

RESTORYING OUR RELATIONAL MOSAIC: BUILDING  
COMMUNITAS IN THE CHURCH THROUGH  
NARRATIVE THERAPY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	ix
ABBREVIATIONS .....	xiii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: MINISTRY FOCUS.....	6
SYNERGY.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	16
LITERARY CONTENT OF GENESIS 48.....	16
CHARISMATIC VERSUS PRIESTLY EXPERIENCE .....	25
RE STORYING BY PAUL .....	31
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	48
AUGUSTINE’S SELF-PERCEPTION .....	49
AUGUSTINE’S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD .....	52
AUGUSTINE’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH.....	53
RE STORYING IN OTHERS .....	55
CHAPTER FOUR: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	61
BEING HUMAN .....	61

COMMUNITY .....	66
HINDRANCES TO HEALTHY SELF-CONCEPTS .....	69
OVERCOMING PROBLEM STORIES .....	88
CHAPTER FIVE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	101
ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY .....	105
CHAPTER SIX: PROJECT ANALYSIS .....	116
TRIANGULATION OF DATA AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS .....	116
THE TREATMENT .....	120
RESULTS OF THE PRE-PROGRAM SURVEY .....	126
COMPARISONS OF PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM INTERVIEWS .....	129
ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWING/COUNTERVIEWING SESSIONS .....	147
RESULTS OF THE POST-PROGRAM SURVEY .....	169
DISCUSSION: THE PARTICIPANTS .....	170
DISCUSSION: PROBLEMS .....	176
CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS .....	182
BREAKING THE PROBLEM STORY HABIT .....	182
RE STORYING THE RELATIONAL MOSAIC .....	184
CONFIRMING IT IN SERVICE .....	185
A MODEL FOR OLDER ADULTS .....	186
APPENDIX A: PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM SURVEY .....	189
APPENDIX B: PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	191
APPENDIX C: EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS .....	194
CHERIE .....	195
BERT .....	211



EMILY .....	232
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	245

## **ABSTRACT**

### **RESTORYING OUR RELATIONAL MOSAIC: BUILDING COMMUNITAS IN THE CHURCH THROUGH NARRATIVE THERAPY**

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The focus of this research is the use of narrative therapy to develop feelings of connectedness within regular church attendees who are at-risk for dropping out of church because of detachment. Participants in this qualitative, six-week study took part in a modified form of narrative therapy that identifies problem stories, encounters alternate stories through counterviewing, includes the support of the church family, and re-stories participants' lives in a positive way. It was my hypothesis that feelings of disconnection could be changed through narrative therapy. The conclusion may include the development of an assimilation tool that enhances connectedness within church members.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As insurmountable as it may sound, I wish to thank all those who have contributed to the success of this thesis. Jesus Christ deserves the first place, for he is my strength and my song and there would be no reason to expend such an effort without him. My wife and children, too, like an incarnation of Christ, gave me a reason to press on and provided the endurance and joy I needed to lighten the burden on this journey. They deserve the greatest applause for their patience and support over the past three years. My mentors -- Drs. Tom Dozeman, Karel Hanhart, Stephen Swisher, and Lori Reiber -- and other staff and faculty members at the seminary -- including Mark Condry and Drs. Hudson, Cothran, Grimes, and Boomershine -- provided a sense of belonging, liberation, and shared mission that enabled me to find my identity as a doctor of ministry. My peers in the program provided the sounding board for several terrible ideas and loved me anyway. Special thanks to my professional associates -- Drs. Emma Justes and Linda Theis and Decky Alexander -- for their wealth of knowledge and kind guidance. For the members of Faith Church, who stayed the course with me since it all began, I hold an immeasurable sense of love and gratitude.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Fred Cramer, Andy DeYoung, and Jim Roe, who believed in God's work in me, even when I did not.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figures

1. Church Attendance at Faith Church from 2002 to 2013 .....	7
2. Generational Groupings in early 2014 .....	8
3. A Mosaic of My Life .....	106
4. Percentage of Modifiers in Cherie's Interviews .....	132
5. Percentage of Modifiers in James' Interviews.....	134
6. Percentage of Modifiers in Bobby's Interviews .....	135
7. Percentage of Modifiers in Bert's Interviews .....	138
8. Percentage of Modifiers in Carol's Interviews .....	140
9. Percentage of Modifiers in Emily's Interviews .....	142
10. Percent Increase in Positive Modifiers in All Post-Program Interviews .....	145
11. Percent Increase in Negative Modifiers in All Post-Program Interviews.....	145
12. Percent Increase in Negative and Positive Modifiers with Composite.....	146

## Tables

1. Comparison of Isaac's and Israel's Blessings.....	17
2. Comparison of Jacob/Israel's Encounter with God at Luz.....	20
3. Comparison of Saul/Paul's Encounter with God on the Road to Damascus.....	38
4. Trinitarian Perspectives on the Imago Dei.....	62
5. Christian Dual Nature Perspectives on the Imago Dei .....	63
6. The Five Innate Traits of Humankind based on the Dominion Mandate .....	64
7. Comparison of the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 1 and Genesis 9 .....	65
8. Qualities of Human Relationships and Their Implication .....	67
9. Common Untruths that feed our Problem Stories.....	74
10. Problem Stories and What They Say About Us.....	74
11. Hindrances to Healthy Relationships in a Healthy Community of Faith.....	76
12. Spiritual Remedies to Spiritual Problems with Symptoms.....	90
13. Interview Length by Number of Pages for All Participants .....	126
14. Results of the Pre-Program Survey.....	129
15. Participants' Responses to Survey Questions.....	130
16. Percentage of Modifiers in Each Interview .....	130

17. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in Cherie's Interviews .....	131
18. Flux Matrix for Cherie's Data.....	132
19. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in James' Interviews .....	133
20. Flux Matrix for James' Data .....	133
21. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in Bobby's Interviews.....	135
22. Flux Matrix for Bobby's Data.....	136
23. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in Bert's Interviews.....	136
24. Flux Matrix for Bobby's Data.....	137
25. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in Carol's Interviews.....	138
26. Flux Matrix for Carol's Data .....	139
27. Number of Words Used in All Interviews (with Average), by Education.....	140
28. Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility in Emily's Interviews.....	141
29. Flux Matrix for Bobby's Data.....	141
30. Worksheet for Determining Baseline Average of Modifiers Spoken.....	143
31. Average Percent Increase of Modifiers in Participants.....	145
32. Favored Questions (by individual) in Pre-Program Interview.....	146
33. Favored Questions (by individual) in Post-Program Interview .....	146

34. Results of the Post-Program Survey .....	169
35. Flux Matrix of the Pre- and Post-Program Survey by person.....	170
36. Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Cherie .....	195
37. Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Bert .....	211
38. Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Emily .....	232



## ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
DD	Developmental Delay
<i>etc.</i>	<i>et cetera</i>
ITA	Initial Teaching Alphabet
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
VBS	Vacation Bible School

## INTRODUCTION

Regardless of what you call it, narrative therapy is a vital part of what pastors do. Imbedded in our calling is the desire to find out who our people think they are and how they see themselves fitting into the body of Christ. Then, we seek to correct that thinking that does not lead down a healthy path. I recall, as a young believer, my pastors and others who filled that role continually wrestled with me over claims I made about myself. I was a member of the body of Christ and the family of God, they said; and, though I accepted that in theory, I did not understand how I could hurt when others hurt or identify with those whose experience did not equal mine. No matter how much I wanted to help others walk with God, my noxious, individualistic self-concept held me back from experiencing and helping others experience God's fullness as effectual members of a vibrant church. Those perceptions are the constant target of the pastoral counselor.

Our relational mosaic needs to change. For generations, we have set the individual as the centerpiece of our faith and have paid for it with a barrage of Lone Rangers, mavericks, renegades, and rogues in the body of Christ. We need free thinkers and revolutionaries; but we need them inside changing us rather than outside throwing stones. Since the 1960s, the church has embraced an Existentialist approach to evangelism, testimonials, and designer ministries that have eroded the church's potential, relevance, and impact in the world. Our self-absorbed designer faith has given rise to a generation of samplers who may or may not come to church, float from one church to another, or

simply sit in the back of the sanctuary and watch the show. Today, whatever most Christians want to contribute is what they think is sufficient. The freedom to practice religion has given way to the freedom to be religious but not practice anything.

The disparity between Christians' unhealthy self-perception and their longing for an elusive *communitas* is what this study is about. It may be said that the problem of dwindling churches lies in older church members' failure to bridge the generational gap,<sup>1</sup> placing the blame primarily on the shoulders of the Baby Boomer and Builder generations, who continue to worship and serve God through experiences that are vibrant to them but meaningless to the younger crowd. Others claim the disconnect between younger Christians and the church may stem from faulty self-concepts in young people rather than the aloofness of the elders. Narrative therapy, one proposed solution to the latter claim, deals with what people think of themselves and how self-perception influences their relationships with life and with others.

Church attendees who are disconnected from other members in the church are what I consider "at risk." Like children who want to drop out of school because they are disconnected from the social and educational climate of school, these church attendees are at risk for dropping out because of a disconnection from the social and spiritual climate of the church. For whatever reason, they have made a conscious or unconscious decision to think about themselves and their surroundings in a certain unhealthy way. Randall calls at-risk "that vulnerable state where [a person] is either "acting in" or "acting

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1. Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gap in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2001).

out."<sup>2</sup> Those who “act in,” those who repress or suppress their feelings and thoughts and harbor unspoken misery, are the subjects of this study.

It was my hypothesis at the onset of this project that feelings of disconnection in at-risk attendees could be changed through narrative therapy by restorying at-risk churchgoers’ lives with an emphasis on their identity as people equipped with five relational qualities shown in Genesis 2. These traits are, namely, the abilities to (1) remove aloneness, (2) share mission, (3) remove limitations, (4) experience mutuality, and (5) experience confident self-disclosure.

Narrative therapy is an approach to counseling that involves the identification and treatment of a problem story, which is a chronic, habitual, inner discourse that hinders a person’s psycho-social growth. Developed as a recognized form of psychotherapy since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, narrative therapy focuses on an organic treatment of interviewing and counterviewing rather than on traditional forms of treatment such as psychoanalytical labeling, close self-surveillance, and medication. Proponents of narrative therapy observe that labeling people as “depressed” or “self-defeating” seems to be counterproductive to the treatment of individuals struggling with unhealthy self-talk. Often, it essentializes them as a one-dimensional “basket case” rather than as a normal, multi-faceted person who just happens to have a bad habit.

Narrative therapy has to do with truth-learning. Restorying has to do with truth-telling about oneself. In narrative therapy, people are reminded (1) they are not the sum

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2. Robert L. Randall, "Ministers and Churches at Risk," *Christian Century* 108, no. 34 (November 20, 1991): 1093-1095. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed October 22, 2013): 1094.

of all their failures and (2) they are not just “refugees in their own lives.”<sup>3</sup> People need to know that the true story of their lives is not a problem story, but a combination of stories that are intertwined with each other and with the stories of others. The end results of narrative therapy are (1) restorying, which is the retelling of the person’s life history that reveals a more accurate, and therefore more healthy self-perception and (2) re-entry into the community as an agent of positive reinforcement and change.

Shapiro and Ross state, “The basis of narrative therapy is social constructionism or the idea that the way people experience themselves and their situation is ‘constructed’ through culturally mediated social interactions.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, narrative therapy begins with the premise that culture helps people within the community construct and/or reconstruct their identity as members of the community. Turner observed that cohesive people groups such as aboriginal tribes and churches contain rituals and rites of passage that enrich these communities by including periods of separation, liminality, and aggregation.<sup>5</sup> The result of such a process is *communitas*, which can be defined as a culture of common transformation. Within a Christian setting, those suffering from unhealthy self-concepts can rediscover their identity as members of the body of Christ and restory their lives in a way that invigorates them and revitalizes the *communitas* of the local church.

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3. Stephen Madigan, *Theories of Psychotherapy Series: Narrative Therapy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010, 2011), 101.

4. Johanna Shapiro and Valerie Ross, “Applications of Narrative Theory and Therapy to the Practice of Family Medicine,” *Family Medicine* 34, no. 2 (February 2002): 96.

5. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 94.

This thesis contains two main parts. Chapters One through Five explain the foundational research that informed the project. Chapters Six and Seven discuss the project itself and the findings. In Chapter One, I discuss the ministry focus, including narrative therapy and the reasons for choosing this model. I also explain how I came to understand narrative therapy as a valid treatment for unhealthy self-talk. In Chapter Two, I discuss the Biblical Foundations of my work. Special emphasis will be made on the restorying done by Jacob/Israel in Genesis 48 and by Paul in Acts 26. In Chapter Three, I explain the Historical Foundation of restorying in the church. I will examine the restorying in Augustine's *Confessions*, and its impact on Augustine and the church. In Chapter Four, I will focus on the leading theological ideas that inform my thesis, including the basis for narrative therapy and restorying, the necessity of *communitas*, and the underlying reason for connecting at-risk attendees to the rest of the body. Chapter Five will be devoted to the theoretical foundations of this project. This will include a contemporary analysis of research as it relates to the subject; a basis for using certain sources; and a comparison and contrast of ideas that surround narrative therapy and constructivism theory.

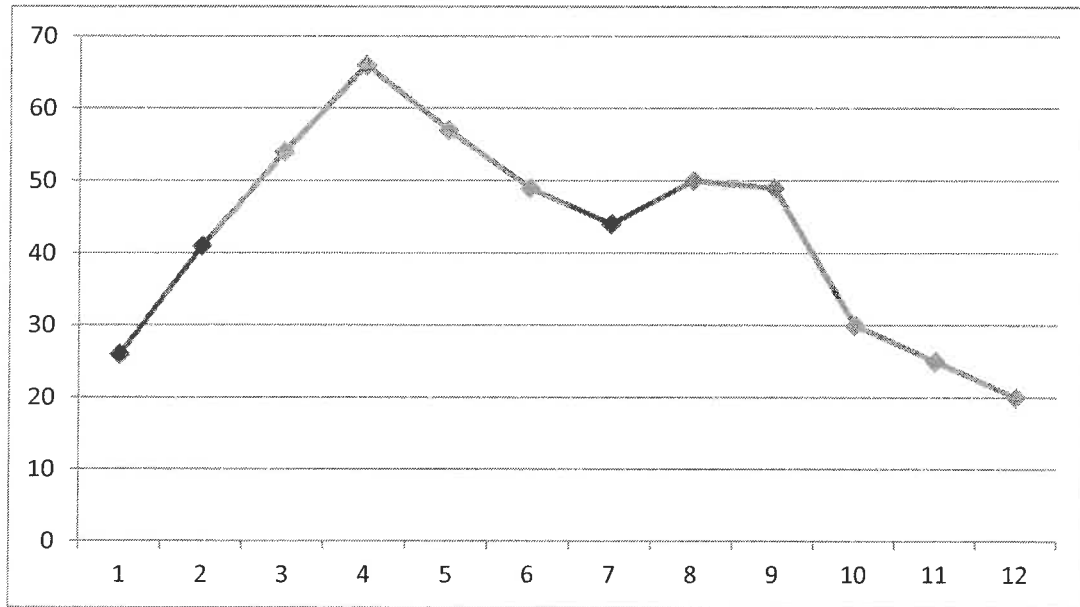
Chapter Six is the project analysis, beginning with the design of the model, followed by the implementation of the project and the collection and analysis of data. It concludes with the results and observations. Chapter Seven provides my reflections on the field experience and recommendations for modification based on my experience with the implementation of the model. It also presents insights through lessons learned.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

The context for this study was Faith Church, a rural fellowship affiliated with an Evangelical, Pentecostal/Charismatic denomination which is devoted to (1) developing healthy relationships with God and with others, (2) reaching the lost, and (3) making disciples. Faith Church was a relatively new body of believers, having been built less than fifteen years ago. It was a small church, consisting of twenty-three regular attendees.

Faith Church's history was plagued by disconnectedness. It suffered a church split in 2002, reducing the congregation of nearly seventy to around twenty-five. Figure 1 shows the average attendance in the twelve years immediately following the split (*#1 representing 2002 and #12 representing 2013*). Though Faith Church experienced rapid growth from 2002 (*#1*) to 2005 (*#4*), decline has been steady since then, with a marginal increase from 2008 to 2009 when a youth minister with children of his own was hired for a short time to bring young people in from the community. After the youth minister left, though, the decline continued. On one Sunday morning in January, 2013, there were seven attendees besides the pastor, his wife, and their four children. Of the current attendees, about half of them have been attending for less than seven years.



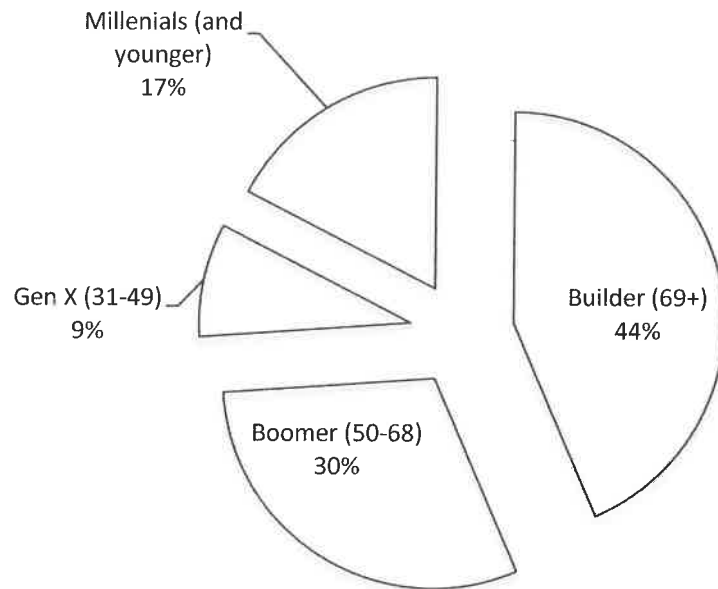
**Figure 1: Church Attendance at Faith Church from 2002 (#1) to 2013 (#12).**

Though the church once thrived with a full worship team, VBS, Missionettes and Royal Rangers clubs, children's church, youth ministry, and other forms of outreach, by 2013, it was a skeleton of its former self. There was no outreach to adults; no special ministry to young people; and the worship team consisted of the pastor, his daughter, and a library of accompaniment tracks. The pastor's wife served as a Sunday school teacher, outreach worker, and sound board engineer. The pastor, who came to the church from Michigan in 2012, wore many hats, including pastor, chairman of the board, worship leader, Christian education director, Sunday School teacher, drama director, event planner, bulletin designer, web host, workshop developer, part-time secretary, and lawn mower.

Financially, the church suffered severe losses because of the decline in attendance and the loss of working families. One elder left in 2012. Another passed away in 2013. Seventy-five percent of the congregation was either unemployed or retired. In 2012 and



2013, the church was forced to cut back on advertising, stipends to the youth pastor, décor, and outreach expenses. The youth pastor and her husband (the worship leader) moved away. The church van was sold. In 2013, the pastor's salary was reduced to \$14,400 annually.



**Figure 2: Generational Groupings in early 2014**

As shown in Figure 2, members of the Builder Generation (those born before 1945) made up almost half of the church's population (44%). According to McIntosh, the dynamics of this generation include a tendency toward loyalty, respect for authority, and sacrifice for the sake of community.<sup>1</sup> McIntosh wrote that the Builder Generation "will support a church with problems or even a declining church, since they feel it would be disloyal to leave."<sup>2</sup> These church members are liable to be more capable of expressing

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1. Gary L. McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 3.

2. *Ibid.*, 46.

words of love and encouragement than others.<sup>3</sup> However, they also tend to be unswervingly private about their own lives. They “like the idea of knowing about people but resist sharing deep concerns that would allow them to really know each other...Topics of a personal or intimate nature are taboo.”<sup>4</sup> This makes it difficult for younger generations to relate to them and become assimilated into healthy relationships (as the younger generation defines healthy).

The next sizeable group at Faith Church was the Baby Boomers (30%). Boomers are often more educated than Builders, which sometimes results in a more open-minded view of social situations and tolerance of people who are different from them.<sup>5</sup> They believe they “must try to make the world better for everyone”<sup>6</sup> and want relationships with others that include an “open and honest understanding of how people think and feel.”<sup>7</sup> However, because of the collapse of the nuclear family in the 1960s and 1970s, the instability of the workforce, and the need to sacrifice relationships in order to stay employed, Boomers find it difficult to manage long-term relationships because they “have not known the support of continuing relationships.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, Boomers want people to say how they feel; but they do not stay around to hear the answer. People who consider longevity a key component of healthy relationships find Boomer believers spiritually weak.

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3. McIntosh, 52.

4. Ibid., 40.

5. Ibid., 83.

6. Ibid., 86.

7. Ibid., 91.

8. Ibid., 85.

At the beginning of this program, these two groups – Builders and Baby Boomers -- represented 74% of the church and helped create an “I am an island” mentality in the main body. Though the pastor was a Baby Boomer, he was the youngest of them, making him the bridge between a large contingency of older attendees and a small group made up of younger adults and children. The younger adults and children were comprised of the pastor’s wife and children and one other young family.

There were two problems that Faith Church presented. Perhaps the most apparent problem was that there were more people who left the church over the past two years than those who stayed. This included visitors who came more than three times (five people), new converts who attended sporadically (five people), and mature believers who left for reasons other than relocation (twenty people). Though most of these people did not remain in contact with the pastor to discuss the reasons for their departure, a few spoke with the pastor at length to shed light on the main problems. According to one person, he had no supportive relationships with anyone in the church with the exception of the pastor. Two others claimed they left because of the inactivity/lethargy of the main body. These scenarios were witnessed by the pastor on more than one occasion and, in fact, occurred so frequently that the pastor was eager to find a solution before everyone left and the church’s doors were forced to permanently close.

The main problem, succinctly stated, was that church attendees who felt disconnected from other members at Faith Church were at-risk for dropping out of fellowship. Though the church had a large contingency of mature believers, it did not have the *communitas* indicative of healthy religious groups. People’s relational mosaic told them that healthy relationships were all about being polite on Sunday mornings and

cordially attending church events when convenient. The pastor and existing church members needed to take action and create a sense of connectedness that transformed people from being at-risk outsiders to being engaged, active members of a *communitas*.

### **Synergy**

I am the pastor at Faith Church. My background in struggling with chronic unhealthy self-talk; my spiritual formation in a church that was a culture of common transformation; and my experience ministering to at-risk youth and adults prepared me to be an agent of change at Faith Church.

Being a victim of chronic negative self-talk made it easy for me to spot people who talked themselves out of fellowship and other forms of involvement at Faith Church. I knew they had developed and rehearsed these stories in order to keep themselves in a comfortably familiar prison. There was a disconnect from healthy relationships intrinsic to their problem stories, which led them to tune out and drop out too easily from others who could very likely bring healing and transformation. I knew firsthand that problem stories could be combated through alternate stories gained from (1) affirmation from others who believe in God's plan for them; (2) a personal relationship with God nurtured through worship, Bible study, and prayer; and (3) an understanding that people are not the sum of all of their failures, that people are multistoried – including those who have hurt them or whom they have judged unfairly.

The culture of common transformation at my church as a youth set the bar high for me and now served as a model for the development of ministry at Faith Church. As a young man, I experienced a fellowship of people who were changed by an intimate

relationship with God and who took responsibility for the well-being of each member. It was a church that worshipped God gloriously and nurtured people as they would their own families. They took ownership of their role in the body of Christ, which made it easy for me to take ownership of my role as well. This pattern served me in every church in which I ministered, equipping me to seek the well-being of others by becoming a member of worship teams, directing media ministries geared to revealing God's heart to people, and speaking words of hope to marginalized people who tended to be self-defeating. At the cost of higher-paying jobs and prestige, I had sought to dispel myths that oppressed and alienated people and to build relationships, people to people and people to God.

At Faith Church, I began utilizing this ministry model right away. Knowing that a shared transformation among all members was pivotal to the success of my goals for Faith Church, I started my ministry with a series entitled *The Good Life*, which focused on what I believe are the fundamental elements of the Christian faith: loving God and loving people. This emphasis on relationships – rather than academics -- was established from the beginning. Though I suspected many left the church because I was “butting in” to their problem stories, I continued my crusade to establish the model of relational ministry.

In an effort to discover latent vision in members of the congregation, I attempted to meet with every person in the church one-on-one to connect with them socially and to understand each person's sense of purpose at Faith Church. I encouraged people to share the vision God had given them, promising them that I would help them accomplish God's plan for their ministries. I asked them if they would feel comfortable utilizing their giftedness to help build the church up, promising them that I would give them all the

room they needed to exercise their spiritual muscle. People were slow to respond; but some eventually saw the vision for enriching the body through the exercise of their spiritual gifts and the utilization of their talents.

The departure of both worship teams appeared to stop Faith Church dead in the water in late 2012. However, this may have been the most advantageous event of my first year as a pastor. I was put in the position of leading worship with accompaniment tracks, a thought that first caused people to cringe. However, with considerable professional experience in stage performance, music programming, and audio production, I was able to move the congregation closer to an atmosphere of transformational worship that I had failed to get from my former worship leaders. I was able to connect with members of the congregation on a deeper level and lead them to connect with God by selecting songs that helped people seek God, speaking God's heart (words of life) to them between the songs, and expanding the worship from a three-title song service to a half hour or more of participatory communion with their Creator.

My experience as a mentor of young people provided a model for mentoring adults. Years before, my superiors in radio had told me to speak to listeners like they are seventh graders, because most adults think on a seventh grade level. This was corroborated by my graduate studies in child development, which claimed, "For most adults, [Conventional Morality] is the highest stage [of moral development] they will attain."<sup>9</sup> Yet I set my objective on meeting people on their level and helping them reach higher. My use of music and relational therapy in my son's life raised an autistic child

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9. Harry S. Coverston, *Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development* (University of Central Florida, n.d.), accessed November 7, 2013, <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ncoverst/Kohlberg's%20Stages%20of%20Moral%20Development.htm>.

past others' expectations in his moral and social development. This realization -- that transformation is not attained in sterile laboratories but within the context of relationships -- empowered me to use relational tools to help others grow.

Stories were always important to me because of their relational value. Since I first learned to mimic the Smothers Brothers and Bill Cosby comedy albums in the 1970s, I have been an avid storyteller. As a teacher, I found that people learned history better when I told stories. Being involved in Christian drama, dance, singing, and instrumental performance, I discovered the effectiveness of dramatized stories and ballads as rhetorical tools for promoting self-reflection, conferring vision, and constructing meaning. I also learned how comedy performance broke down walls, facilitated openness to a deeper message, and helped connect people to each other. As a mentor of young writers, I saw how storytelling enabled students to develop meta-cognition, build interpersonal skills, and discover inner value as communicators and young geniuses. In my work as a genealogist, I witnessed the effectiveness of biographical sketches in the appreciation of family bonds, the healing of individual identities, and the reformation of multi-generational dysfunction. Storytelling became one of the most important elements of my ministry at Faith Church as well.

My education focused on developing a skill set that would be vital to Faith Church's growth as well. As a youth, I learned to facilitate ministries that dealt with self-actualization and inner healing. In undergraduate school, I focused on communications because of my involvement as a Christian radio host and programmer. Through Christian radio, I learned to craft short messages of hope from God's word; to develop campaigns designed to make forgotten truths more mainstream in the minds of the masses; and to

program songs that would help them connect with God, lift them up, and replace listeners' unhealthy self-talk with positive opinions about themselves. In 2007, I received an MA in Education, which shifted my thinking to a broader view of spiritual formation and trained me to seek people's cognitive, emotive, and social development. Through work with AmeriCorps, I received training in creating sustainable programs, mentoring program facilitation, and community service program development.

This background would come in handy at Faith Church, where a lack of functional, sustained relationships made it easy for problem stories to thrive. The general disconnect among the people demanded a treatment that would do more than get people active or build a polite community of like-minded believers; it had to address the deep issues of the heart, connect people to each other, and help them restory their relational mosaic.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine two biblical cases of restorying – one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament – which informed a pilot program of narrative therapy designed to build *communitas* at Faith Church. Restorying, the way I use it, is the retelling of stories with the intent to explain life from a mature, healthy perspective. In light of the current program, this perspective is the sense of *communitas*, which is defined in this project as *a spirit of oneness based on a shared self-perception, theology, and purpose in Christ*. The passage from the Old Testament is the deathbed blessing scene of Israel recorded in Genesis 48.

#### **Literary Content of Genesis 48**

Israel's deathbed experience begins with a messenger who informs Joseph of his father's illness. Consequently, Joseph assembles his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and goes to see his father. When Israel hears that his son had come to visit him, he "summoned his strength and sat up in bed" (Gen 48:2).

This is not the first deathbed blessing recorded in the Bible. In fact, Israel had received the blessing from his father Isaac in a similar fashion. There were at least eleven similarities between the two deathbed blessings besides the fact that they came at the ends of their lives. Though the poor eyesight and better blessing on the second born may

have been somewhat incidental (albeit a deliberate choice of detail on the part of the writer), the rest of these parallels reflect complicity, perhaps a societal norm that was either isolated to the specific family or held by many people in the ancient Middle East. Thus in the story of Israel's deathbed blessing, we do not see as much of an unscripted interaction between Israel and Joseph's sons as some would like to see, but a culturally approved protocol applied within the context of a socio-religious ritual.

**Table 1: Comparison of Isaac's and Israel's Blessings**

<b>Isaac's Blessing (Gen 27)</b>	<b>Israel's Blessing (Gen 48)</b>
Isaac's eyes dim (v. 1)	Israel's eyes dim (v. 10)
Promise of blessing (v. 4)	Promise of blessing (v. 9)
Intervention of an older mediator – Rebecca (v. 6-17)	Intervention of an older mediator – Joseph (v. 1)
Isaac stirred by meal (v. 4, 25)	Israel stirs himself to meet them (v. 2)
Identification of the recipients of the blessing -- "who are you?" (v. 18)	Identification of the recipients of the blessing -- "who are these?" (v. 8)
Acknowledgement of God's provision -- "The Lord thy God brought it to me" (v. 20)	Acknowledgement of God's provision -- "These are the sons whom God has given me here" (v. 9)
Draw near, embrace, and kiss (v. 21-27)	Draw near, embrace, and kiss (v. 10)
Better blessing of the second born (v. 27-29)	Better blessing of the second born (v. 14-20)
Complaint of mistaken blessing (v. 34-36)	Complaint of mistaken blessing (v. 17-18)
Refusal to reverse blessing (v. 37-40)	Refusal to reverse blessing (v. 19-20)
Lesser blessing on the rest of the heirs (v. 39-40)	Lesser blessing on the rest of the heirs (Gen 49)

This scene is an essential step in the process of passing the faith of Abraham to the next generation – an expectation raised in Genesis 18:19 – "[Abraham] will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD." Speiser acknowledges that "the main concern is for the proper link with the next generation, to maintain the continuity of patriarchal traditions... [and] to emphasize this

continuity in both directions.”<sup>1</sup> After so many years apart, it is essential that Joseph’s faith is informed by Israel one last time. Joseph obviously has a sense of the providence of God, for he acknowledges that “these are the sons whom God has given me here” (Gen 48:9). He also clearly has learned to respect his elders, for he bows facedown as he presents his sons to Israel (Gen 48:12). Joseph shows a keen understanding of protocol in the cultic transference of blessing since the ceremony is much like that of his father’s when he received the blessing from his father (Gen 27). Nevertheless, Israel points out something Joseph may have overlooked: the character of God.

During the blessing ceremony, Israel tells and retells his story four times, each time from a different perspective, but all for one purpose. Before he can conclude his message, Israel must tie Joseph and his sons to the family’s cultic experience. He begins his four-part testimony by showing he and Joseph have similar circumstances (both are outside of their homeland and have lost someone very special to them -- Rachel). Next, he reminds Joseph of the years Israel thought he was dead and the miracle of restoration. This is followed by a connector of Joseph’s story to that of his father and his ancestry. Finally, he removes himself from the story and applies it to Joseph’s relationship with God. To understand Israel’s line of reasoning, we must examine the passage and the four stories within their biblical and historical context.

### First Story

God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will

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1. E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 358.

make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.’ (Gen 48:3-4, NRSV)

This first story is an allusion to the events that happened earlier in Israel’s life – back when he was called Jacob. In Genesis 28 and 35, we find Jacob at Luz – the first time as he left the Promised Land and the second as he returned to it. As he left, Jacob dreams of the Lord standing at the top of a ladder that angels continually use to ascend and descend; and the Lord pronounced a blessing on Jacob and promised that his offspring would be like the dust of the earth. Like Abraham and Isaac, Jacob is promised that all nations would be blessed through his offspring. God also promises to be with Jacob, to keep him, and to bring him back to his homeland. The word “keep” is the Hebrew *shamar*, which is the same word used in Gen 2:15 when the Garden of Eden was given to Adam to “keep it” and also in 1 Samuel 17:20 in reference to David, who left the sheep with a “keeper.”

However, in the opening scene in Genesis 48, Jacob does not bring up these details – the blessing of all nations, the shepherding role of God, and the return to the homeland. Jacob specifically refers to the time he was returning from Paddan as recorded in Genesis 35. As Jacob returns from Paddan, the story goes, angels meet him (32:1) and Jacob wrestles with God at Peniel (32:24-32). His name is changed to Israel (32:28; 35:10), which is reflected in the deathbed reference to him as Jacob in the first few verses (48:2-3) and then Israel after he mentions his encounter with God at Luz (48:8). Upon reaching Luz the second time, God speaks to him again. At this meeting, God reiterates part of the promise he made to him years beforehand. It is this reiteration that Israel paraphrases on his deathbed (see comparison below).

**Table 2: Comparison of Jacob/Israel's Encounter with God at Luz**

Genesis 28:13-15	Genesis 35:11-	Genesis 48:3-4
I am Jehovah (v. 13a)	I am El Shaddai (v. 11a)	El Shaddai appears (v. 3)
the Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring (v. 13b)	The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you (v. 12)	And will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding (v. 4c)
And your offspring will be like the dust of the earth (v. 14a)	Be fruitful and multiply (v. 11b)	I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers (v. 4a)
and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south (v. 14b)	A nation and company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you (v. 11c)	I will make you a company of peoples (v. 4b)
And all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring (v. 14c)		
Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you (v. 15)		

Wenham points out that the term “holding” is also used in reference to the land given to Israel in Egypt – the land of Goshen – which “unlike Canaan was not a God-given ‘permanent holding.’”<sup>2</sup> The use of this term by Israel may have had a significant impact on Joseph who must have felt pretty good about himself for providing for his family as he did. Here, Israel points out that Egypt could not offer him and his family anything better than what God had in store.

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2. Gordon J. Wenham, “The Last Days of Jacob and Joseph,” quoted in *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2: Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 463.

The parts of the first promise in Genesis 28 left out in Genesis 35 and 48 are still incorporated in Israel's deathbed blessing, but not necessarily all at once. He retells his story three more times.

### Second Story

Israel said to Joseph, I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also (Gen 48:11, NRSV).

The second story is only a sentence. However, by inference and allusion, it implies a longer story already known to Joseph and to the reader. It refers to the years Israel thought Joseph was dead. Genesis 37:28 says Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. The act was completely undetected by Israel, for the brothers had covered up their crime by fabricating the story of Joseph's tragic death (Gen 37:31-33). Israel mourned bitterly for his son (Gen 37:34-35) and pined for him for many years (Gen 44:27-34).

Within the wording of the text here, Israel said he "did not expect" to see Joseph's face again (48:11). The Hebrew word is "palal," meaning "to judge, to execute judgment...to think, to suppose...to pray."<sup>3</sup> The prospect of ever seeing Joseph again was more than unreasonable; it was preposterous. The contrast is astounding: It did not even occur to him that he could to ask God to see his son's face; yet God caused him to see Joseph and his sons. God's faithfulness is defined here by Israel in the fact that God goes above and beyond his expectations. He not only returned his son to him, but gave him tangible proof that his line would continue. In the ancient world, this provision would have been considered as more than a simple gift. It was the reversal of an event that

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3. Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *palal* (Strong's 6419)". *Blue Letter Bible*. 1996-2013, accessed March 15, 2013, < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H6419&t=KJV> >.

confounded one of Jacob's only signs of lifetime achievement. In the ancient world, ancestry and descent were defining factors in a person's identity and therefore his or her dignity. Thus, God does not just promise blessing; he fulfills it in ways that astound.

### Third Story

The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys (Gen 48:15-16, NRSV).

The third story finally takes the pressure off Joseph; it is about Israel and his relationship with God. However, it is more than that. Israel ties the story of Joseph and himself to their ancestors. Hamilton refers to this story as "a testimony covering three generations."<sup>4</sup> Abraham and Isaac were said to walk before God; but Israel is not out of the loop himself. God may have visited Abraham, but God was Israel's shepherd who watched over him "all my life to this day." (Gen 48:15). This is not one-upmanship, though, for Israel is not intending to boast here. Rather, he confirms that it is the same God who appeared to his fathers who continues to bless him and his offspring.

In this story, Israel also uses the metaphor of "the angel," which Wenham identifies as "the angel of God/the Lord...an appearance of God in human form."<sup>5</sup> This is the one who wrestled with Jacob the night before he was reunited with Esau, for Jacob summarized this moment with the words, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32:30). In Genesis 48, it is this angel that Israel says "redeemed me from all harm" (Gen 48:16). The Hebrew term for redeemed is *ga'al* (or *go'el*) here, or "rescue." Wenham says, "'The rescuer'...was usually the nearest male relative, whose responsibility was to bail

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4. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 637.

5. Wenham, 465.

someone out if he fell into debt or slavery.”<sup>6</sup> In a sense, Israel is pointing out to Joseph that he too had been in a prison – perhaps a prison of grief and pain. By implication, he is making a statement about two of the fundamental characteristics of God. God is a shepherd and a rescuer.

#### Fourth Story

“I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors.” (Gen 48:21).

In the final story, Israel has removed himself almost entirely, making it appear as a simple encouragement: “God will be with you” (v. 21b). However, this platitude is preceded by the phrase “Behold I die, but...” (v. 21a). The context of Israel’s death is significant to this phrase, for it adds authority to his words. As Israel’s grandfather and father have died, so Israel will die; yet Joseph can be assured that the same God will be with him. In this simple phrase, Israel reiterates what God told him on his first visit to Luz (28:15). He also uses it to wrap up the main point of each of the three preceding stories. God promises to bless, fulfills his promises in ways that go beyond our expectations, and watches over us our entire lives. This all boils down to one general message: God is with us. This is, indeed, not just the testimony of Jacob/Israel’s life, but also that of every story in Genesis, of the Torah, and of the entire Bible. Indeed, it is the central truth of the gospel, according to Jesus, who said, “The kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:14). This is not a story about Israel – as Hamilton points out: “He does not say to Joseph, ‘Son, let me tell you what God did for me at Luz.’ Rather he implies: ‘Son, let me tell you about our God.’”<sup>7</sup> The writer of

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6. Wenham, 465.

7. Hamilton, 628.



Genesis has developed the concepts of the creation, judgment, salvation, and revelation of God prior to this passage; but the story of the development of a Hebrew community of faith is incomplete without the explicit teaching that is expressed in this chapter.

Whether it was essential to Joseph to hear these words from his father is difficult to quantify, although it could be argued from a developmental standpoint that Israel's words must have been elemental in Joseph's spiritual formation. Reflecting on Joseph's life story, the reader could easily see how God had been Joseph's shepherd – even in bondage and in prison. Nevertheless, the lesson of God's nearness, whether explicitly or implicitly learned at this moment or at other times in his life, would be well established in Joseph's faith expression by the time he responded to his brothers' fears in Genesis 50. Instead of exacting revenge for their crime, Joseph pointed out the hand of God (Gen 50:20), who had kept him safe through it all – just as God had done for Israel.

This message is further defined by Israel's reminder of the Promised Land in Genesis 48:21. He is not just near; he has a plan for this nation. The nation will find its fulfillment only in following God back to Canaan. It is there that God wants to plant them for a specific purpose: to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 28:14). This turns the entire family of Israel into a God-appointed ambassador of God's glory. Gal wrote that Jacob's wrestling match with God established him as a person who wrestled with the Divine Other<sup>8</sup> -- someone who is transcendent from, different from, or outside of normal human experience. Just as God is a Divine Other, so Israel and his family was a divinely-appointed other. The otherness of God's chosen people must be passed down to the next generation. This is not a teaching of exclusivism – ostracizing outsiders and protecting

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8. Nissim Gal, "Fall of God into Meaning: Painting Time in Jacob Wrestling with the Angel," *Theatre Research International* 34, no. 2 (July, 2009): 187-193.

their way of life from cultural decompression. It is about the keeping of God's ways (Gen 18:19), which they must accept and diffuse to their neighbors. They must preserve their cultic identity, not because their cultural identity is special, but because their message and righteous way of life is God's plan.

### **Charismatic Versus Priestly Experience**

It is interesting that Israel testifies to God's character in four different ways – each time after Joseph has attempted to take charge of the blessing ceremony. The first attempt came at the very beginning when Joseph learned of his father's illness. Though Israel was ill, Joseph did not summon a physician or a priest; instead, he brings his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to visit him. This, however, does not turn out to be just a friendly visit. Joseph brings them with intent, implied by the word *so*: "...Joseph was told, 'Your father is ill.' *So* he took with him his two sons..." (Gen 45:1, italics mine). Joseph knows his father's days are short; he intends to be present at his deathbed. This is not necessarily ill intent; it is standard protocol for people to gather at the bedside of their dying patriarch. Nevertheless, the fact that Joseph and his two sons are the only ones mentioned in this context tells us that Joseph was the one who took charge of the situation. Joseph initiated the ceremony.

Something happens next that Joseph may not have anticipated. Hamilton points out that there is a clash of perspectives coming in the deathbed scene: "Joseph is a traditionalist. He has no reason to believe that anything out of the normal is about to occur."<sup>9</sup> Instead of receiving a blessing, Manasseh and Ephraim are claimed by Israel as

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9. Hamilton, 636.

his own. Israel says the two boys “are now mine” (Gen 48:5). While Joseph is prepared for a blessing ceremony, Israel is moving into a different kind of ceremony: adoption. Hamilton compares Israel’s words to a law in the Code of Hammurabi that legitimized children by the simple pronouncement of the father: “my sons.”<sup>10</sup>

Though Wenham suggests that Israel’s statement, “Who are these?” (Gen 48:8) tells us Israel’s eyesight was so bad he could not distinguish them,<sup>11</sup> Hamilton concludes that this may have been “understood as part of the formal prelude to the forthcoming blessing...formal recognition by Joseph that the young men are his sons [as in] the question at a wedding, “Who giveth this woman to this man?”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this is supported by the statement that Israel “saw Joseph’s sons” (Gen 48:8) and said, “God has let me see your children also” (Gen 48:11). Sarna confirms this: “We have here the second stage of the legal adoptive process, namely, the establishment of the true identity of the candidates for adoption by formal interrogation of the natural father.”<sup>13</sup>

After Israel claimed Ephraim and Manasseh as his own, Joseph takes charge a second time by his response to his father: “They are my sons, whom God has given me here” (Gen 48:9). These are not Israel’s, as Israel just told him; they are Joseph’s sons. We must be careful not to infer that Joseph was upset by Israel’s claim; yet we can guess that Joseph may not have been prepared to give up full title. Israel testifies again to God’s character by reminding Joseph that he had not expected to ever see Joseph’s face again --

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10. Hamilton, 629 & 638.

11. Wenham, 464.

12. Hamilton., 633-634.

13. Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 327.

yet God had enabled him to see Joseph's "seed" (v. 11). Indirectly, he ensures Joseph that these boys are indeed Joseph's children. Yet they are more than Joseph's children; they are the pleasant surprise God gave to Israel at the end of his life.

At this point in the passage, Joseph takes charge again. It appears that he has grown wary of the way the ceremony is going and wants to put people back into their rightful spots. All of this hugging and kissing may be somewhat undignified for the man who is now second to Pharaoh. He removes Ephraim and Manasseh from the situation. Wenham considers the embracing and kissing as "another gesture betokening his legitimization of them as the equals of his sons."<sup>14</sup> It is agreed upon by many scholars that the verse saying Ephraim and Manasseh are taken "from his father's knees" (Gen 48:12) does not imply that the two had been sitting on Israel's lap. Davidson and Hamilton point out that Joseph's boys must have been in their twenties.<sup>15</sup> Speiser writes, "The act of placing a child on the father's knees signifies acceptance of the child as legitimate."<sup>16</sup> Davidson calls it a show of "paternity."<sup>17</sup> However, to place such large boys – men actually – on Israel's knees would have been awkward and equally dangerous for the aged Israel. Davidson brings clarity to this confusion by explaining that the word "bless" and "knee" were "closely related"<sup>18</sup> in the Hebrew language, which indicates that Joseph had not removed them from his father's knees but from his father's *blessing*.

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14. Wenham, 464.

15. Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 294; Hamilton, 635.

16. Speiser, 357.

17. Davidson, 295.

18. Ibid.

This does not imply that Joseph did not want his father to bless his boys. Rather, Joseph did not want the blessing to continue without the proper protocol. He wanted to continue the ceremony in the proper fashion and showed this by bowing facedown (v. 12). The term for bow here is *shachah*, the same word used in Genesis 37:9-11<sup>19</sup> to describe Joseph's dream that said his father would bow to him. In this case, a bow is an outward sign that is expected of subordinates (as Joseph was) in the blessing ceremony, meaning there is no indication of his spiritual condition or that Joseph is doing anything more than is expected of him.

After bowing, Joseph follows the next requirement of custom: He positions his sons according to seniority in front of Israel so he can lay his right hand on Manasseh and his left hand on Ephraim. However, Israel is not finished breaking protocol. In the words of Hamilton, he "ignores the law of primogeniture."<sup>20</sup> He crosses his arms and deliberately lays his hands on the wrong people. He then testifies to a third characteristic of Elohim. God is the Shepherd of human souls:

The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth (Gen 48:15-16).

For the fourth time, Joseph has to take charge. His father has put his hands on the wrong boys. Joseph tries to move Israel's hands and teaches him a lesson on propriety. Sternberg noted that Joseph here does what any dignified family member might do and

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19. Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *shachah* (Strong's 7812)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2013, accessed March 15, 2013. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H7812&t=KJV> >

20. Hamilton, 636.

“firmly stage-manages the blessing scene for his doting father.”<sup>21</sup> Israel explains himself to Joseph and then shares one last testimony about God’s character. To Israel, God is one who will “be with you” and who will “bring you again to the land” (Gen 48:21). Just as Joseph is trying to instruct Israel on the protocol of enlightened Egyptian culture, Israel wants to remind Joseph that he does not belong to Egypt. Joseph and his two sons are not Egyptians; they are Israel and are destined to be returned to their homeland.

Wenham says Joseph’s displeasure at Israel’s crossed hands “implied powerful anger.”<sup>22</sup> Munck points out that the term used in Genesis for Joseph’s awareness that something was “wrong” was the Hebrew *ra’a*, meaning “evil.” He wrote, “Joseph laments that what his father is about to do is “evil.”<sup>23</sup> This is very often the response of those who expect certain protocol to be followed and then are disappointed to find their sense of propriety insulted. Such was the case already seen in Genesis in God (Gen 3:13), Pharaoh (Gen 12:18), and Abimelech (Gen 26:10), who were so angry with Adam, Abraham, and Isaac that they each uttered the Hebrew word *asah*,<sup>24</sup> which is translated, “What have you done?” In those cases, their sense of propriety was correct; but now it is not about morality but cultic ritual. At this point, Joseph’s inner turmoil has come out. He must say something about the way the ceremony is going; and it is only at this time that the missing ingredient in Joseph’s faith can be addressed. Israel says,

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21. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 352.

22. Wenham, 466.

23. Hamilton, 640-641.

24. Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *asah* (Strong's 6213)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-201, accessed March 15, 2013, < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H6213&t=KJV> >

I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations (Gen 48:19).

This is not a mistake that cannot be reversed as happened in Isaac's botched blessing of Jacob dressed as Esau (Gen 27). Israel has blessed the boys deliberately according to his own intent. In fact, Israel's answer implies that the blessing was an unseen directive from God. Joseph needs to know this and that God's agenda always takes precedence over our own. Joseph has perfected the ritual but has forgotten that this is not about protocol; it is about submission to God's plan. It may be that Joseph, suffering from faulty relational mosaic – a problem story that led him to choose perfectionism over relationships – needed to get his head on straight. Who better to teach that lesson than one who had overcome a faulty relational mosaic himself?

The four stories of Israel in Genesis 48 bring a reasonable conclusion to the story of Genesis. God is one who (1) fulfills promises, (2) exceeds expectations, (3) shepherds, and (4) walks with God's people. God also expects submission from those who are called by his name. By implication, the passage shows that every tribe in Israel must recognize its cultic identity. Just as the Otherness of God is a pivotal part of our faith, so is the Otherness of God's people. Every tribe in Israel – even those who were once disconnected – is part of God's plan to enjoy relationship with God and to be a blessing to every nation. All believers under the Abrahamic covenant are called to *communitas* – a shared self-perception, theology, and purpose in God.

### Restorying by Paul

Israel was not the only person who participated in restorying for the purpose of building *communitas*. In Acts 26:1-29, Luke retells the story of Paul. It is not just a testimony of Paul's conversion; neither is it just a story of God's continued move in Paul's life. Rather it is persuasive appeal to bring people into the family of God.

The setting for this passage is a first century "audience hall" (Acts 25:23) in Caesarea where the Apostle Paul is preparing to be heard by Governor Festus and his special guests, King Agrippa II and Queen Bernice, along with an audience made up of important people in the city. Paul has been in jail for more than two years – first under Governor Felix and now under Festus, who does not seem to know what to do with him. Years ago, Paul had been seized by Jews in the Temple in Jerusalem and dragged outside, where certain people tried to kill him. As the noise of the crowd increased, soldiers were alerted and took Paul into custody. After learning of a plot to kill him while in prison, the tribune had him sent to Caesarea for safekeeping. Incarcerated for two years, Paul made his appeal to Caesar because, he said, "I have done no wrong" (Acts 25:10). Indeed, Paul was an innocent man, accused of being an "agitator" (Acts 24:5) when it was the Jews from Asia Minor who had started the riot (Acts 21:27). Festus was prepared to send Paul to Rome, but not before allowing his guests to satisfy their curiosity by hearing Paul speak about his situation (Acts 25:22).

To the reader, only a few pages have turned from Acts 21 to Acts 26, playing tricks on our perception about the passage of time; but Paul has had much time to prepare his defense. If he were Cicero or Demosthenes, he would have created the perfect argument, organized his points, memorized his message, and rehearsed his speech daily



in order to present a stellar case for his release. However, this is not Cicero or Demosthenes; this is Paul, the one who would soon write that Christ sent him “to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power” (1 Cor 1:17). “Eloquent wisdom” is the Greek *sophia logos*, meaning “the ability to discourse eloquently of...the philosophy of the Greeks.”<sup>25</sup> While Paul may well have known proper Greek rhetorical theory, he was not obligated to follow its rules. Indeed, he knew that the cross of Christ was “foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23), leaving him in a position to either come up with a better line of defense or to forget about winning his release and strive for a different sort of success.

### Paul’s Introduction

According to the passage, Agrippa was the one who gave Paul the floor: “You have permission to speak for yourself” (Acts 26:1), a proper way to start the passage, considering the environment, for no one should give testimony before being acknowledged by the presiding officer in a court of law. The first century reader may have recognized the conventionality of Paul’s opening gesture as well, for he stretched out his hand as he began to speak – what Willimon calls “the traditional pose of the classic orator.”<sup>26</sup> Porter notes this was the same gesture he used in Acts 13:16 and Acts 21:40 as a signal that he was prepared to speak.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 582.

26. Willimon, 176.

27. Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (Tuebingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 158.

Paul begins his speech by making his introductory remarks to Agrippa, although there is no indication that he is oblivious to the other listeners in the room. Indeed, he later makes the statement that he hoped everyone who was listening that day would come to Christ – evidence that his message was not just for Agrippa. He honors Agrippa for his special knowledge of Jewish affairs, implying that the dignitary was more familiar with Jewish customs and controversies than most people. This was a given considering Agrippa's background as a great-grandson of Herod the Great and a great-nephew of Herod Antipas, the one who questioned Jesus on the day of the crucifixion. Herod's family had served as rulers in Judaea for more than one hundred years.

It would be too far a stretch to presume that Paul is using flattery here, for Paul claimed, "We never came with words of flattery..." (1 Thes 2:5), indicating he avoided it as a matter of principle. This is especially important because of his audience who would have been suspicious of sweet talk due to Plato's words in *Gorgias*: "[Flattery] cares not one jot for what is best...angles for folly and deludes to such a degree as to get the credit of being something of the highest value."<sup>28</sup>

That Paul must have known this is speculative, although it is clear that he is very familiar with classic rhetorical conventions.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, nothing Paul says here can be misconstrued as anything more (or less) than the truth. Of course, Agrippa does not need to know this detail, forcing the question in our minds: Why does Paul say this? Porter

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28. Plato, "Gorgias," quoted in *Plato's Gorgias: Literally Translated with an Introductory Essay, Containing a Summary of the Argument*, trans. E.M. Cope (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 29.

29. Conzelmann points out that Paul speaks in an "educated" manner; classical forms appear... (Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 210) and "one detects formalized expressions" (Ibid., 211). Blass suggests Paul displays a finesse that shows he is trying to use Attic Greek (Friedrich Blass, *Philology of the Gospels*, London: Macmillan, 1898, 9-10).

suggests he does so to “[draw] Agrippa into the nature of the dispute at hand.”<sup>30</sup>

However, there may have been at least two other reasons. First, it is necessary for Paul to begin this way due to standard protocol in a court of law. The speaker must always address the presiding dignitary in a way that confers honor to him or her in the presence of an audience. Packer calls this “the usual complimentary address.”<sup>31</sup> Conzelmann says “it is simply appropriate style.”<sup>32</sup>

Another reason Paul acknowledges the familiarity of Agrippa with Jewish issues may be because he needs to establish the fact that Jewish customs and controversies are different from those in Greek or Roman culture. In this cosmopolitan world he lives in, there are nuances of Jewish culture that cannot be judged by Greco-Roman standards. By calling attention to Agrippa’s familiarity with Jewish customs and controversies, Paul appropriates customary language while laying groundwork of the Otherness of Jewish culture in the minds of the non-Jewish audience.

The next part of Paul’s introduction is the acknowledgement that the Jews knew Paul’s background – a fact that may show in Paul’s favor. He said, “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee” (Acts 26:4-5). This statement is full of ammunition, for not only does it imply that the Jews have turned on

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30. Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (Tuebingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 159.

31. John W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles Commentary* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 202.

32. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 209.

Paul, one of their own people; but it also implies that their reluctance to exonerate Paul is due to their unwillingness to tell the truth. These two points may easily persuade Paul's listeners to take his side in this conflict, for who would deny release to any person who has been treated this way? Yet Paul forces the issue further by adding – almost as an afterthought – that he is a Pharisee. He is not just a Jew who has been betrayed and slandered by his people; he is a member of one of the strictest and most respected sects in Judaism. Paul paints himself as an innocent victim much like the prophets were known to have been victims despite their blamelessness before God. This connection is implied later when Paul questions Agrippa, “Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe” (Acts 26:27).

With what appears to be an introduction, Paul's alleged thesis has been given; his innocence is clear. It is not a plea for release, though; it is simply a confirmation to the audience that he is a credible source. This credibility is based on his status as a Christian prisoner and well as his background as a devout Pharisee. Packer states, “In an argument, no man can speak with such authority as the one who has personal knowledge of both sides.”<sup>33</sup> This is a fact that will be established even more as Paul continues his story.

We know that his innocence is not his main point because what follows is not an examination of the three points he has just made. He almost incidentally refers to his accusers' betrayal; but there is no mention of their dishonesty. Eventually, he speaks of his piety, which may have been a subtle reminder to Agrippa of his innocence.

Nevertheless, he does not ask for release. Indeed, he refers to his chains in a way that is rather amusing, perhaps endearing him to his audience. At this point in the passage, Paul

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33. Packer, 203.

changes the rules. Paul's purpose for speaking is not release. He has finished with his innocence, which is only a springboard into his real purpose. As Porter says, "he refers to his speech as 'bearing witness' in v. 22."<sup>34</sup> Paul wants to share his testimony.

### Paul's Testimony

In Acts 26:6, Paul states his real thesis – one that is more important to him than proving his rights have been violated. He says, "*I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors...Why is it thought incredible...that God raises the dead?*" (Acts 26:6). This is the thesis Paul intends to argue, for he devotes the majority of his speech to it, concluding with the statement "I pray to God that...all who are listening to me today might become such as I am" (Acts 26:29). To make this clear, he uses a narrative with three foundational points: (1) a previous opposition to Christianity, (2) an encounter with the risen Christ, and (3) an ongoing relationship with God after coming to Christ.

Paul's first point centers on his life before he came to Christ. This is a linear argument that sets the stage for a before-after testimony. At first, he says, he opposed Christianity. In fact, he was such an enemy of the church that he (1) received authorization from the chief priests to imprison Christians, (2) voted to condemn many to death, (3) tortured them to force them to recant, and (4) pursued Christian refugees to foreign cities. These four proofs testify to Paul's zeal for what he believed he "ought to do" (Acts 26:9). By implication, there should be no question in the listeners' minds that Paul's fervor met the requirements of what was then reasonable religious expression. To

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34. Porter, 159.

the first century Jewish mind, Paul's actions were not unusual, for it was only what a good Jew did. However, this line of reasoning also begs the question, "With such a strong beginning as an opponent of Christianity, what happened to convince Paul to make such a reversal in his theology?" Indeed, the irony of Paul's previous practice of hauling Christians in chains from Damascus to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2) compared to his current state of a Christian having been hauled in chains from Jerusalem to Caesarea is striking and causes the reader to expect the same question answered.

In this first point, Paul lays the groundwork for a comparison of the character of his accusers with himself by putting himself in his accusers' shoes and allowing the audience to be the judge. He says of his previous lifestyle that he was "furiously enraged," or *perissos emmainomai* in Greek.<sup>35</sup> Thayer explains *perissos* as "over and above, more than is necessary,"<sup>36</sup> indicating that, though his actions may have been warranted, his attitude was disproportionate. *Emmainomai* is rendered as "exceedingly mad against" someone.<sup>37</sup> According to Thayer, it is used only once in the Bible and also by Josephus in *Antiquities*. The usage in Josephus is "wild rage"<sup>38</sup> regarding King Herod's insane deathbed command to execute the principal men of the Jews upon his death so he could have mourners at his funeral.<sup>39</sup> Whether Agrippa had read Josephus or

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35. Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *perissōs* (Strong's 4057)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2013, accessed March 15, 2013, < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G4057&t=KJV> >

36. Thayer, 505.

37. Ibid, 207.

38. Ibid.

39. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17,6,5, accessed May 16, 2013, [https://ia701201.us.archive.org/21/items/theAntiquitiesOfTheJews\\_507/TheAntiquitiesOfTheJews-flaviusJosephus.pdf](https://ia701201.us.archive.org/21/items/theAntiquitiesOfTheJews_507/TheAntiquitiesOfTheJews-flaviusJosephus.pdf).

not, he knew the stories of Herod the Great – Agrippa’s great-grandfather – and therefore understood from experience what Paul meant when he referred to himself as “furiously enraged” (Acts 26:11). Conzelmann suggests that, by pointing out the “senselessness of the conduct”<sup>40</sup> when he was opposed to Christianity, Paul alludes to the deceptiveness of emotion, which is one of the chief warnings of Greek rhetoricians of the period. Plato wrote in *Phaedo*, that feelings (passions, pleasures, or pain) deceive people into believing “that what causes such feelings must be very clear and very true, which it is not.”<sup>41</sup>

Now that Paul has pointed out his excessive behavior before coming to Christ, his second point gives his audience a reason to agree with him that he should stop persecuting the church – by inference, a position the Jews should adopt as well. Paul says the resurrected Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light and spoke to him about his present and future life. In the ancient world, visions and oracles held a certain power in public discourse. In this case, Paul experienced both. The vision depicted a light “brighter than the sun” (Acts 26:13), causing him to fall to the ground. The oracle first questioned Paul’s persecution, then appointed Paul to testify to and open the eyes of the Gentiles, and finally promised to rescue Paul from the Jews and Gentiles.

**Table 3: Comparison of Saul/Paul's Encounter with God on the Road to Damascus**

Acts 9:3-6	Acts 22:6-10	Acts 26:13-18
Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. (v. 3)	While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. (v. 6)	At midday along the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions (v. 13)

40. Conzelmann, 210.

41. Plato, “Phaedo” 83c, quoted in *Plato Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1977), 34.

He fell to the ground (v. 4a)	I fell to the ground (v. 7a)	When we had all fallen to the ground (v. 14a)
And heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (v. 4b)	And heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (v. 7b)	I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts to kick against the goads” (v. 14b)
He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (v. 5)	I answered, “Who are you, Lord” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting” (v. 8)	I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” (v. 15)
“But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” (v. 6)	I asked, “What am I to do, Lord?” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.” (v. 9)	But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.” (v. 16)
		“I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you” (v. 17)
		“to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (v. 18)

The use of the phrase “open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18) may have been an allusion to Isaiah 42:7, which is considered Isaiah’s commission by God. By framing his commission from Jesus in this way, Paul makes the case that he is in the same company as the prophets – an insinuation noted by Willimon,<sup>42</sup> Packer,<sup>43</sup> and Bruce.<sup>44</sup> Paul may have hoped to use this connection later when he would

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42. William Henry Willimon, *Acts Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 178.

43. Packer, 204.



ask Agrippa, “Do you believe the prophets?” (Acts 26:27), driving the point home that Agrippa should be very careful in his decision, for Paul is like one sent by God.

Though the epiphany on the road to Damascus appears to be new information to Agrippa and Bernice, it is not new to the reader, who has read this testimony twice before in the book of Acts. The comparison in Table 3 may shed light on Paul’s choice of words and details.

The inclusion of 26:16b-18 in Paul’s account to Agrippa is conspicuous, although not too alarming to the reader. Between his conversion in Acts 9 and his arrest in Jerusalem in Acts 21, the reader witnessed Paul’s call by God to missionary work (Acts 13:2), God’s protection of Paul in all of his hardship, and the power of God in operation in Paul’s life as many were turned away from darkness to salvation in Christ. The accounts in Acts 9 and Acts 22 do not contain the extra verbiage that Paul claims in Acts 26; but there is no reasonable cause to accuse Paul of fabricating it. It is reasonable to say that Jesus may have said much more to Paul on the road to Damascus than Luke records in Acts 9 and Acts 22 – perhaps even more than Paul ever shared. Indeed, it may have been Luke’s intent to withhold this detail for this final disclosure in Acts 26. Indeed, if he had not done so, the call of Paul in Acts 13 and his adventures thereafter as a missionary would have been somewhat lackluster, for the reader would have already seen it coming.

In this message, Paul builds on the first point by contrasting the furious rage he once had with his abject humility. Before his meeting with Christ that day, he was out of his mind with hostility; now a heavenly being has put him in his place, knocked him to the ground, and forced him to submit to God’s summons. Of special note is the term

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44. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 467.

Jesus used when he referred to the object of Paul's persecution: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?" (Acts 26:14, italics mine). When a person opposes the church, he or she opposes Jesus. This must be taken into account by the Jews who are persecuting Paul as well as by Agrippa and Festus. It is a close match to the warning the readers of Genesis must have felt when they read, "Cursed be everyone who curses you" (Gen 27:29b).

Moreover, just as Israel testified that God promised to watch over him in Genesis 28, so Paul testifies that Jesus promised to "rescue" him from all who seek to harm him (Acts 26:17). The word in Greek is *exaireo*, which Thayer identifies as "to rescue, deliver."<sup>45</sup> It is the word used by Luke in Acts 7:10 to describe God's rescue of Joseph "from all his afflictions." It is also used by Luke in Acts 7:34 to show how God rescued Israel out of Egypt. In Acts 23:27, Luke used it to show what the tribune in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, did for Paul when the crowd was about to kill him. Claudius disentangled him from the rioting crowd and took him into custody for safekeeping. In a sense, he had acted as a shepherd who rescues a sheep from a pack of wolves. Thus, Luke ties Paul to Joseph, the son of Israel and to the entire Jewish religious experience.

Paul's final point is perhaps the most powerful argument in (1) his defense and (2) his plea for souls. Paul says he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19), a statement that does not mean the same as "was obedient." Obedience would have brought glory to Paul as a hero of sorts, while his lack of disobedience to the heavenly vision (1) puts the emphasis on Jesus' calling and (2) states the case that, in legal terms, makes Paul an innocent victim caught in the middle between the kingdom of God and the "power of Satan" (Acts 26:18). If anyone should be on trial here, it is God, who called

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45. Thayer, 221.

Paul to turn away from his former way of life and appointed him to preach the gospel.

The implication is ludicrous to the reader as well as to Paul's audience. Yet this is Paul's intent – to put God on trial and let the facts prove God innocent. If the persecution of Christianity is overkill and Jesus actually did appear to Paul on the road to Damascus, then Paul's lack of disobedience to the heavenly calling declares his innocence.

In this final point, Paul reveals one more characteristic about his faith that seems to be a missing ingredient in his adversaries' religious experience. In contrast to the intemperance of the rioters, Paul's faith is based on a relationship with a God who watches over him. He has already claimed that Jesus promised at his conversion to rescue him as he fulfilled his commission; now he states "To this day I have had help from God" (Acts 26:22). This has clear connection to Israel's statement that God "*has been my shepherd all my life to this day*" (Gen 48:15). Paul's new faith is not based on a religious system that requires human effort to protect it; rather, it is based on a relationship with a God who walks with his people as with a friend.

All of this is not just a testimony for the sake of telling Paul's story. Rather, Paul is dedicated to the very purpose Jesus has commissioned him. Willimon notes, "Paul did not conceive of religion before or after his Damascus road experience as primarily a matter of self-fulfillment."<sup>46</sup> If this were the case, Paul's testimony only needed to be an entertaining story of happiness in Jesus – and the conversion of the hearers only a bonus. Paul had a different purpose. Paul's objective is stated after Agrippa winsomely says,

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46. Willimon, 180.

“Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?” (Acts 26:28).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Paul has stated his aim before: “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]” (Acts 26:18).

Now Paul reaffirms his goal by telling Agrippa he wants nothing more from him and all who are listening than to “become such as I am” (Acts 26:29). This is not an exclusivist religion that unifies people by their cultural homogeneity; neither does it encourage its people to tell stories for the sake of self-glorification. Paul’s desire is to usher as many people as possible into the family of God. Like Israel at his deathbed blessing, Paul is making his hearers aware of the Otherness of God, the otherness of God’s people, and the need to join with him as sojourners for the sake of the gospel.

Just as we have seen in the deathbed blessing of Israel, so we see in Paul’s final testimony: The message of the Bible, including the legacy of Abraham and the Gospel of Jesus that Paul preached, is the nearness of God. Both Genesis and Acts told and retold stories that were different each time; but there were different circumstances and different purposes each time. The incongruities of the stories from the original events do not constitute discrepancies, but a difference of intent. Indeed, Israel’s and Paul’s choices of words appear decisive. They both break the rules yet use the rules as a springboard into their central point. They both move from testimony about what God has done in their lives – to walk with them, to rescue them, and to fulfill promises made to them -- to an application of the message to the listeners (and readers). As Peter said at the end of his

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47. John W. Packer writes, “The N.E.B. gives the right interpretation. Agrippa’s reply is neither a sarcastic rejoinder nor a heartfelt cry of a man on the threshold of conviction. It is the winsome reaction of a thoughtful man who sees the point but will not be convinced” (John W. Packer, 205).

speech at Pentecost: “The promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39), they both used their stories to do more than eulogize themselves; they created a sense of the Otherness of God, to establish the otherness of the family of believers, and to build *communitas*.

### Paul’s Developing Self-Esteem

Though we saw the Apostle Paul’s restored testimony, we may also glean something about the Christian perspective on self-esteem by revisiting his story as it unfolds in his epistles. In one of his first extant writings (c. AD 40), Paul described James, Cephas, and John as apostles who “were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me” (Gal 2:6a, NRSV) and who “contributed nothing to me” (Gal 2:6b, NRSV). In fact, he boasted, “When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned” (Gal 2:11, NRSV). This was a self-assured Paul, one was untouchable because he carried “the marks of Jesus branded on my body” (Gal 6:17, NRSV). He freely threw out curses (Gal 1:8) and insults (Gal 3:1) and made himself equal to Cephas by stating, “I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised” (Gal 2:7, NRSV).

About a decade later, Paul penned his first epistle to the church in Corinth (c. AD 53-57). In this letter, he seemed much more subdued. He still insulted the believers at Corinth, calling them “infants” (1 Cor 3:1, NRSV); but he is very cautious about speaking ill about the other apostles. In fact, he makes it clear that the body of Christ is not divided, twice making special mention of Peter in a positive light (1 Cor 1:12-13 and

3:22). His goal with this letter is to establish a sense of belonging to each other (1 Cor 3:21-23), a common protocol of love (1 Cor 13:1-13), and a common purpose to “win more of them” (1 Cor 9:19, NRSV). His self-image, which once made him equal to the other apostles, has changed: “I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” (1 Corinthians 15:9, NRSV).

Once again, about half a decade later, Paul writes to the church in Ephesus (c. AD 62). This time, he has nothing but good things to say, rejoicing over them and encouraging them. Though he begins his letter by stating he is an apostle “by the will of God” (Eph 1:1, NRSV), as we read, we almost see him forget his position. He is not just the least of the apostles, he is “the very least of all the saints” (Eph 3:8, NRSV). As he grows older, his self-perception appears to be changing to one of abject humility.

Finally, Paul addresses a letter to his disciple, Timothy (c. AD 62-67), who is his “my loyal child in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2, NRSV). He instructs Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth” (1 Tim 4:12a, NRSV), something he has always believed. However, the protocol for making sure he is shown respect is not to quarrel (1 Tim 2:8) but to “set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12b, NRSV). Paul has learned to show deep respect for people – even those who hold a lower rank. He tells Timothy not to “speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father” (1 Tim 5:1, NRSV). In this letter, Paul’s description of himself seems as low as it can get. He has not only stripped himself of the phylacteries of the title apostle (though he still acknowledges he is one); he does not even consider himself the worst of the saints. He is “the foremost” of sinners (1 Tim 1:15, NRSV).

By 21<sup>st</sup> century psycho-babble standards, Paul is going the wrong way in his thought life. In fact, it would be easy to say that Paul has a low self-image and ought to be recommended for therapy. If he were to participate in narrative therapy as it is used by many today, he would likely be told he has a problem story of helplessness – and that it was getting worse. It may appear his use of negative self-talk has found its way to his mouth and has been immortalized by a scribe for generations of future readers. His locus of control – that is, his explanation of the powers that control his life – must be deficient, because he relies on a God who reduces him to such a state of degradation.

However, Paul appears to be getting wiser and more eloquent in his old age. He is no longer a disconnected hot-head, throwing stones at Peter and at the church in Galatia. He is a humble servant of God and mentor to thousands of Christians in Greece and Asia Minor. He sees himself as a teacher and apostle (1 Tim 2:7), a person judged by God as faithful (1 Tim 1:12), and an example to everyone of how amazing God's mercy is (1 Tim 1:16). There is no question that Paul thinks of himself correctly. Something else must be going on here.

The terms self-image, self-talk, and locus of control are often given improper modifiers, which clouds the true aim of psycho-social therapy. If a person has a low self-image, he or she is said to need a boost. Yet how does the essential characteristic of humility fit on the spectrum of high-to-low self-image? It does not, without some degree of distortion. If a person is said to entertain negative self-talk, which is generally identified as unacceptable, where on the spectrum of positive-to-negative self talk should we place reasonable guilt over crimes committed? An external locus of control is said to be improper because it makes a person's life subject to powers that are outside of his or

her control. Yet how can we believe in the possibility of relationships – with God and with other people -- without some degree of an external locus of control? Every person in our lives is an outside force who has an effect on our present and future state. Perhaps we should not assess self-image, self-talk, and locus of control as high-low or external-internal, but rather as healthy or unhealthy.

The difficulty with speaking of a healthy self-image, etc., is the identification of what that means. From a Biblical perspective, we have a clear model in Paul. Paul knew the truth from many angles. Certainly, he was the worst of sinners; but he was also the best candidate for a miracle and a witness of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Mark and Gordon McMinn claim that Paul had a reformulated model of learned helplessness which enabled him to maintain a “realistic appraisal of his helplessness” in which his “self worth was not threatened – he was complete yet inadequate.”<sup>48</sup> Essentially, Paul’s experience trying to deal with sin in his life showed him that he was helpless to overcome it in his own power; yet his experience with the indwelling Holy Spirit showed him that there was hope. Even though he was helpless in himself to overcome, he did not give up (Phil 3:13-15). He could do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13).

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48. Mark R. McMinn and Gordon N. McMinn, "Complete Yet Inadequate : The Role of Learned Helplessness and Self-attribution from the Writings of Paul," *Journal Of Psychology & Theology* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 1983): 303. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 27, 2014), 303.



## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

The use of spiritual autobiography to express a healthy self-concept and build *communitas* is deep-rooted in Judeo-Christian experience. It predates the plethora of personal testimonies in recent years crafted by Existentialist, Baby Boomer Evangelicals and informed by NavPress or CBMC self-help templates. In fact, long before John Bunyan, George Fox, or Peter Abelard wrote their life stories, Christians have used autobiography to substantiate their claims about Jesus Christ and to establish the validity of their position in the church.

One of the oldest extant autobiographical Christian testimonies is *Confessions* by Augustine, bishop of Hippo, written approximately 300 years after Luke recorded the conversion of Paul in Acts 26. Annemare Kotze, in *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience*, wrote, "Augustine's thought on various issues of universal importance has drawn scholars to the *Confessions* for centuries...and continues to do so."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, *Confessions* became a second model (the first being Paul's testimony) which would influence the church for more than a thousand years. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, professor of humanities at Pennsylvania State University and director of Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine, points out that *Confessions* became an archetype for many, including such figures as St. Teresa, Petrarch, and Norwood in their

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1. Annemare Kotze, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 8.

own spiritual autobiographies. She wrote, “*For generations of readers, Augustine’s experience of conversion...has served as a paradigm for what happens during conversion.*”<sup>2</sup> This archetype of Christian testimony shows how Augustine developed a healthy relationship with himself, God, and the church.

### Augustine’s Self-Perception

The way Augustine wrote about himself in *Confessions*, at first, looks much like self-hatred. He gives himself no credit for his knowledge, good nature, or character. He appears to think God will likely despise him, even though he knows God may also have compassion on him.<sup>3</sup> He criticizes himself because, even as a baby, he said, “I was indignant with my elders for not submitting to me...for not serving me; and avenged myself on them by tears.”<sup>4</sup> He referred to himself as a “poor wretch”<sup>5</sup> as a boy and as “wretched man”<sup>6</sup> in adulthood. The problem story of shame because of his self-centeredness – the unhealthy relational mosaic – seems to be the theme of his life until his conversion.

As the *Confessions* unfolds, though, Augustine appears to portray himself in more positive ways. If he were a biblical character, he would have been a conglomerate of several heroes. His prevailing use of prayers and passages from the Psalms makes us

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2. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Archetypes of Conversion: The Autobiographies of Augustine, Bunyan, and Merton* (Canbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1985), 44.

3. Edward Bouverie Pusey, trans. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Book I* (Oxford: J.H. Parker; London: J.G. and F. Rivington. 1838), 4.

4. *Ibid.*, 5.

5. *Ibid.*, 7.

6. *Ibid.*, 17

wonder if he did not see himself as a 4<sup>th</sup> century David. Having been won to the Lord through a passage in Romans, Augustine identified with Paul's writings, inserting them often into his own story as if he had written them himself. In addition, Augustine's prayer is much like that of the Prodigal Son returning home, which Hawkins identifies as one of Augustine's models.<sup>7</sup>

Hawkins claims that *Confessions* reads much like Vergil's *Aeneid*, as well, moving "his literary persona into the realm of myth."<sup>8</sup> Brown agrees, writing that Augustine saw himself as a sort of hero on a quest for "the ideal of 'Wisdom.'"<sup>9</sup> Unlike the main character in *Aeneid*, though, Augustine is no hero in the true sense, for he goes to great lengths – to the extent of becoming verbose – to portray himself as a failure. Hawkins warns of the "mythicization of self," which is the inevitable consequence of spiritual autobiography;<sup>10</sup> however Augustine does not allow the reader to think of him as a mythic hero in any way. Mathien says Augustine portrays himself distinctly as "Augustine seeking and Augustine hiding."<sup>11</sup> Augustine begins by showing he is a circumspect philosopher and then exposes himself as a fraud because he is more ignorant of the truth than he pretends.

From a theological standpoint, Augustine saw himself as a social being,<sup>12</sup> but one who was powerless to do anything about it without the grace of God.<sup>13</sup> Brown claimed

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7. Hawkins, 38.

8. Ibid., 34.

9. Brown, 70.

10. Hawkins, 35.

11. Mathien, 42.

12. Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology, 3rd Edition* (New York: Morehouse Publishing), 140.

that Augustine saw himself as a person who could never fully understand himself unless God revealed it to him. He wrote, “Nothing could be more vivid than an inner self-portrait sketched by a man, who had not allowed himself to be lulled into certainty about what he was really like.”<sup>14</sup> O’Connell<sup>15</sup> and Battenhouse<sup>16</sup> pointed out that Augustine viewed himself as a person who needed to return to a God he had forgotten. Once this relationship was restored through the grace of God, Augustine was transformed into that hero who could fulfill his responsibility to his loved ones. Hawkins points out that Augustine and Vergil utilized the term *pietas*, which means “filial devotion and patriotism” (37). It is a duty to those with whom social interconnectedness must be maintained. Hawkins says Augustine does this by sacrificing his personal life, as does Aeneas in Vergil’s *Aeneid* (38).

According to Hawkins, Augustine himself used three models in crafting his autobiography: the *Aeneid*, the Prodigal Son, and the Plotinian doctrine of the journey of the soul.<sup>17</sup> One being Christian and the other two being pagan, Augustine saw himself as a model for people from both worlds. “[In Confessions] we see the confluence of classical and Christian motifs in Augustine’s thought, for both models helped shape the autobiographical re-working of the original experience.”<sup>18</sup>

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13. Thomas and Wondra., 147.

14. Brown, 173.

15. Robert O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 39.

16. Roy W. Battenhouse, ed. “The Life of St. Augustine,” quoted in *A Companion to the Study of Augustine* (New York: Oxford, 1955), 126-127.

17. Hawkins, 34.

18. Ibid., 51.

### Augustine's Relationship with God

It is clear from the very beginning of *Confessions* that Augustine has a deep reverence for the Creator. Written as a prayer, it begins “Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised;”<sup>19</sup> and it ends with “Amen.”<sup>20</sup> Though the stream of consciousness writing style exhibited in *Confessions* can easily be misconstrued as self-righteous due to its centered-on-self nature, *Confessions* is a book devoid of explicit arrogance. Within the thirteen books, Augustine gives very little, if any, credit to himself. In fact, the grace to be “continent,”<sup>21</sup> the ability to heal a soul,<sup>22</sup> and the power to overcome<sup>23</sup> cannot be obtained without God. Mathien points out, “Augustine uses the autobiographical portion of the *Confessions* to show how God’s grace works to convert him by changing what inspires him.”<sup>24</sup>

God’s grace and empowerment is discussed at length in *Confessions*; but they are inactive without one other attribute of the Deity. O’Connell identifies the central theme of *Confessions* as the omnipresence of God.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Augustine’s life story cannot be understood without an understanding of that premise. It is the fact that God is present in his life – even when Augustine is unaware of it -- that makes it possible for God to implement grace and empowerment.

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19. Pusey, 3.

20. Ibid., 163.

21. Ibid., 55.

22. Ibid., 88.

23. Ibid., 15.

24. Thomas Mathien, *Autobiography as Philosophy: The Philosophical Uses of Self-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 35.

25. O’Connell, 39.

God's love is also a key theme in this work. God's love, to Augustine, is something that is dispersed lavishly within his heart through the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Augustine considers God's love a fire that purifies and molds him,<sup>27</sup> something that he, as a confirmed philosopher, desperately craves. Mathien writes, "God's grace is not merely merciful because it absolves Augustine of guilt or commutes his sentence of damnation. It is restorative. It works to mend and transform – to heal – its subject."<sup>28</sup> This sort of continual attention to restore and transform can only be traced to the loving care of his Creator. Indeed, it is God's love that compels him to cry out, "Who is like unto Thee, Oh Lord?"<sup>29</sup> This, then, is the reason for his utter self-abasement: to highlight the transforming power of the holiness, mercies, presence, and love of God.

### **Augustine's Relationship with the Church**

Augustine writes *Confessions* not to brag about his life before coming to Christ or of his accomplishments afterward, but to win people to God. Indeed, using his own discussion about the writings of Paul, he implies his own purpose for writing *Confessions*: "not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit."<sup>30</sup> Certainly, Augustine gives the reader a running commentary of his thought processes from birth to adulthood, which may also appear somewhat self-glorifying. However, he often uses events in his life as springboards into discussions about the depravity of humankind (as in his story about

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26. Pusey, 148.

27. Ibid., 130.

28. Mathien, 36.

29. Pusey, 70.

30. Ibid., 159.

stealing pears),<sup>31</sup> the longing of God for those enslaved by lust (as in his story about the removal of his concubine in anticipation of his wedding),<sup>32</sup> and the maneuverings of God to draw the elect to salvation (as in his story about coming to hear Ambrose preach).<sup>33</sup> Each story does not appear to be told for the facts themselves but for the opportunity to reveal how God eventually got through to him. Augustine saw testimony as an external narrative of an internal event that addressed philosophical barriers which may be present in the reader.

For Augustine, conversion was not the ultimate prize, for there was more to salvation than safe passage out of eternal punishment. Peter Brown, in his analysis of the *Confessions*, claimed, “Conversion had been the main theme of religious autobiography in the ancient world...as simple as the ‘sobering up’ of an alcoholic...[However, for Augustine,] conversion was no longer enough.”<sup>34</sup> His conversion is mentioned in Book VIII when Augustine reads a text from the book of Romans and “by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”<sup>35</sup> Yet Augustine writes five more sections of how God sustained him through temptation, loss of physical strength, and grief. Augustine’s autobiography had to go farther than salvation; it had to deal with transformation that would give others the power to overcome life’s remaining temptations and trials.

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31. Pusey, 15.

32. Ibid., 57.

33. Ibid., 45.

34. Brown, 171.

35. Ibid., 80.

Augustine's *Confessions*, though it focuses on the conversion and sanctification of one person, draws people into fellowship within a community of faith. To him, the church was not just a place where people could worship, pray, and hear Biblical teachings; it was a nest for nurturing fledglings<sup>36</sup> and "the mother of us all."<sup>37</sup> He considers church a place where there was "no taste for infantine conceits" and no doctrine that would confine God.<sup>38</sup> In no uncertain terms, it was where Christians belonged, because it was from the church that Christians received training and empowering to be servants of God.<sup>39</sup>

### **Restorying in Others**

Augustine's perspective on a healthy self-image, relationship with God, and relationship with the church was replicated in other Christian authors for more than a thousand years. Hawkins pointed out that the theme of the transformative relationship with God is clearly found in the autobiographies of Norwood and St. Teresa.<sup>40</sup> Peter Abelard, in *The Story of My Misfortunes*, establishes himself, like Augustine, as a lover of philosophy prior to coming to Christ, preferring "the battle of minds in disputation" to "the prizes of victory in war."<sup>41</sup> Though his story begins with a problem story of perfectionism, Abelard writes of his humiliation brought about by arrogance, addressing

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36. Pusey, 36.

37. Ibid., 8.

38. Ibid., 49.

39. Ibid., 83.

40. Hawkins, 44.

41. Peter Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows (St. Paul, MN: Thomas A. Boyd. 1922), 14.



the chief philosophical roadblock of the modern philosopher with words from Paul:

“Knowledge puffeth itself up.”<sup>42</sup> It was when he had “come to regard myself as the only philosopher remaining in the whole world”<sup>43</sup> that Abelard was humbled by his inability to overcome his own lust.<sup>44</sup> Abelard depicted himself as a scholar who needed to be “done with learning for the sake of gain or renown [but] for the sole love of God.”<sup>45</sup> In disgust for his overarching pride, he acknowledges that he could not be saved “were it not for the blessed gift of grace.”<sup>46</sup> He wrote, “Thus did it come to pass that while I was utterly absorbed in pride and sensuality, divine grace, the cure for both diseases, was forced upon me.”<sup>47</sup> Like Augustine, conversion is not the end of his misery, for Abelard still must see God’s hand of grace and mercy as he struggles to overcome the continual pressures of lust and pride.

John Bunyan, in the preface of his autobiography *Grace Abounding*, writes, “It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the very beginnings of grace with their souls.”<sup>48</sup> Thus Bunyan, like Augustine, focuses on the grace God gave him and the extent to which God’s hand went to reach him rather than his own intellectual prowess. Bunyan was certainly not the hero of his story, for he says, “It was my delight to be

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42. Abelard, 22.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 23-27.

45. Ibid., 31.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 22.

48. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), accessed March 10, 2013, [www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/grace.pdf](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/grace.pdf). 5.

‘taken captive by the devil at his will’”<sup>49</sup> and “the thoughts of religion were very grievous to me.”<sup>50</sup> Bunyan, like Augustine, makes it a point to accentuate the excess of his youth and even confessed to have once wished, “that I had been a devil—supposing they were only tormentors; that if it must needs be that I went thither, I might be rather a tormentor, than be tormented myself.”<sup>51</sup> He was no scholar; but he was hungry for God. From the first nightmares he had about eternal damnation as a youth, he wondered about, meditated on, and sought to resolve the inner conflict he had about his pitiful relationship with God. He saw himself as a tormented soul desperately hoping for something he could not quite put his finger on. He was a lost man in need of a Savior to come and find him. Yet for all his sins and fears, he viewed his past failures not as marks of victimization whereby the reader could pity him and mythicize him, but “as the head of Goliath in my hand”<sup>52</sup> that would show the reader that victory is only possible through God.

Though he was not sold to philosophy as Augustine was, he was certainly swayed by the “religion of the times”<sup>53</sup> until “a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul,”<sup>54</sup> which eventually led him to God. Unlike Augustine, Bunyan’s conversion seemed to be a long process of moving closer and closer to God rather than an instant event – wanting connectedness to God as a member of the chosen race,<sup>55</sup> being convicted

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49. Bunyan, 7.

50. Ibid., 8.

51. Ibid., 8.

52. Ibid., 5.

53. Ibid., 9.

54. Ibid., 10.

55. Ibid.

of sin,<sup>56</sup> fearing judgment,<sup>57</sup> meditating on passages from scripture,<sup>58</sup> and wishing he were like those who spoke of a “new birth.”<sup>59</sup> Each episode is like another mile marker in his spiritual journey. Yet this story is similar to Augustine’s, for Bunyan also gives a running commentary of his thoughts and shows how he dealt with temptations and trials as he grew in his relationship with God.

Written in the same generation as Bunyan, George Fox tells his story as one devoted to walking in moderation, without excess and with “a gravity and stayedness of mind and spirit not usual in children”<sup>60</sup> Like Augustine, he pursues wisdom at an early age<sup>61</sup> but did not seem to be touched by temptation. Indeed, there does not seem to be a conversion experience, for he was raised by godly parents and “while a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure.”<sup>62</sup> He speaks of objectivity, reason, and being led by God often.

At first glance, Fox presented himself in much a different way from Augustine. He almost shows a sort of Jesus complex, for he does no wrong, always has the correct theology, and claims to be led here and there by the voice of God. However, he emulates Augustine in three basic ways. First, a quest for right standing with God is the theme of both Fox and Augustine. Fox wrote, “My desire after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or

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56. Bunyan, 10.

57. Ibid., 10-11.

58. Ibid., 16.

59. Ibid., 13.

60. Fox, 27.

61. Ibid., 30.

62. Ibid., 27.

writing.”<sup>63</sup> Second, Fox identifies with various biblical figures and uses passages of scripture to make that connection to the reader. For example, when looking for true Christian friendship, he judges them as “miserable comforters,”<sup>64</sup> much like Job did his friends. Finally, Fox considers a running commentary of his thought life to be significant enough to narrate. What Augustine calls revelation, Fox expresses as the Lord “opening unto” him certain matters.<sup>65</sup> Thus, like Augustine, Fox considered himself an epic hero on a quest, an incarnation of biblical personalities, and a sage whose musings were worth writing down.

Hawkins writes that spiritual autobiography is about “the confluence of inner experience – the heart seeking union and the mind seeking wisdom – with an exterior narrative wherein those interior psychological realities are embodied”<sup>66</sup> and is designed “to make those interior realities of heart and mind incarnate.”<sup>67</sup> When we tell the story of our conversion experience, we search for words that will properly do so. We become a gatekeeper of sorts, choosing what items to omit and what items to include -- not to fabricate information or attempt to deceive by means of concealing the truth, rather to give clear passage to the truth. We omit data that may distract the audience and focus on data that emphasizes our point. We are selective in our choice of details about our

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63. Fox, 35.

64. Ibid., 31.

65. Ibid., 32.

66. Hawkins, 30.

67. Ibid.

relationship with ourselves, our God, and our brothers and sisters in Christ so that, as Augustine said, we produce fruit.<sup>68</sup>

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68. Hawkins, 159.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Healthy constructs of self and the means of constructing them must be theologically sound. This chapter will address certain theological implications of narrative therapy which must be covered for the sake of clarity and support. These aspects include:

1. Elements of healthy self-concepts
  - a. What does it mean to be human?
  - b. What does it mean to be a social being?
2. Hindrances to healthy self-concepts
3. Methods for overcoming problem stories
4. Elements of a healthy church

### **Being Human**

Based on the first chapter of Genesis, God has made all humankind with the same essential qualities. For centuries, theologians have tried to explain what these essential qualities are – what is generally understood as the *Imago Dei*, or image of God created in men and women at creation. Augustine tied it to “a trinity of the mind,”<sup>1</sup> setting a

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1. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity, Book XIV*, Chapter 6, 8, accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.thefishersofmenministries.com/Augustine%20of%20Hippo-On%20the%20Trinity.pdf>.

precedent for other Trinitarian theologians to follow suit. Remarkably, though, there has been a general disagreement about what those alleged three elements are.

**Table 4: Trinitarian Perspectives on the Imago Dei**

<b>Augustine<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Calvin<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Wesley<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Goeschel<sup>5</sup></b>
Memory	Wisdom	Knowledge	Body
Intelligence	Justice	Righteousness	Soul
Will	Goodness	Holiness	Spirit

Many Christian theologians have interpreted the phrase “image of God” within the context of the book of Genesis, rather than trying to force a triangular peg into a round hole. Some focused on a dual nature, though they did not agree on what that dual nature was either. In fact, Augustine and Wesley contradicted themselves, appearing unsure of which position to hold, as shown in Table 5.

According to Sherwin, there are two Jewish approaches to the concept of the image of God.<sup>6</sup> One focuses on the attributes of God that humans share. Still, there is no agreement about what those attributes are. The philosopher Maimonides (d. 1204) believed the main attribute common to both God and humankind is the intellect.<sup>7</sup> The Jewish mystic and lawyer Judah Loew (d. 1609) taught that the image of God meant free

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2. Augustine of Hippo, 8.

3. John Calvin. *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 51.

4. John Wesley, *Notes on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. Wesley, Center for Applied Theology, c/o Northwest Nazarene University, accessed September 13, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-first-book-of-moses-called-genesis/#Chapter%2BI>.

5. Karl Friedrich Goeschel, *Der Mensch nach Leib, Seele, und Geist diesseits und jenseits* (Leipzig: Durffling und Franke, 1856), 6.

6. Byron L. Sherwin, *Jewish Ethics for the 21st Century: Living in the Image of God* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 2.

7. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed, 2nd Edition, Translated from the Original Arabic Text*, trans. M. Friedlander (Hebrew Literature Society, 1904), 1:2.

will.<sup>8</sup> Nahman of Bratslav (d. 1810), who established an innovative branch of Hasidic Judaism, considered the capacity for creativity through imagination to be the meaning of God's image in humankind.<sup>9</sup> It is intriguing to see how each person's idea of the image of God reflected his own philosophical interest and era.

**Table 5: Christian Dual Nature Perspectives on the Imago Dei**

<b>Irenaeus<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>Augustine<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>Aquinas<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Wesley<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>Davidson<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>Barth<sup>15</sup></b>
Reason	Judgment	Reason	Flesh	Governance	Male
Free Will	Dominion	Intelligence	Spirit	Relationship	Female

The second concept of the image of God in Jewish tradition addresses the activity of God that humans take part in – rather than simple character traits. Because God creates, makes things grow, improves things, protects, nurtures, and rules, so men and

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8. Byron L. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 118.

9. Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 341.

10. Irenaeus, "On Humanity and the Image and Likeness of God - Latin and Greek Text with English translation," 4.4.3, quoted in *Early Church Texts: Relevant extracts from Adversus Haereses*, accessed September 12, 2013, [http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/image\\_and\\_likeness.htm](http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/image_and_likeness.htm).

11. Pusey, 156.

12. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica: Benziger Bros. Edition*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947), 32.

13. John Wesley, *Notes on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Wesley Center for Applied Theology, c/o Northwest Nazarene University, accessed September 13, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-first-book-of-moses-called-genesis/#Chapter%2B1>.

14. Robert Davidson. *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 25.

15. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Doctrine of Creation, Part I* (London: T&T Clark Ltd, 1958), 207-220.



women are created with these tasks. According to this view, humans are created to operate as moral agents in the world around them – “to act as God acts.”<sup>16</sup>

Christian theologian Dr. Mark Vanderhart seems to agree with this view and points out five imperatives within the context of the blessing pronounced over humankind in Genesis 1:28: (1) to be fruitful, (2) multiply, (3) fill the earth, (4) subdue the earth, and (5) rule over all creatures.

**Table 6: The Five Innate Traits of Humankind based on the Dominion Mandate**

<b>Imago Dei (Genesis 1:28)</b>	<b>Capacity</b>
Be fruitful (Hebrew: <i>para</i> , to produce something after one’s own kind <sup>17</sup> )	Produce, Reproduce, Grow, Be Creative
Multiply (Hebrew: <i>rababa</i> , to become myriads; ten thousand <sup>18</sup> )	Increase, Swell, Replicate <i>en masse</i>
Fill the earth (Hebrew: <i>mala</i> , to fill <sup>19</sup> )	Spread out, Proliferate, Saturate
Subdue it (Hebrew: <i>kabas</i> , to conquer; “to force to beget offspring as in the breeding of animals,” <sup>20</sup> )	Take Control for the purpose of taming, domesticating
Rule (Hebrew: <i>rada</i> , to tread as one would grapes in a winepress or, figuratively, to ravage with fire as God would do in the soul of a believer. <sup>21</sup> )	Possess, Own, Govern (by implication, for the purpose of producing something of greater value)

16. Sherwin, 2000, 2.

17. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (London: Bagster & Sons, Ltd., 1857), 688.

18. Frances S. Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic, Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 914.

19. Gesenius, 473.

20. Ibid., 383.

21. Ibid., 758.

These imperatives are called the “dominion mandate.”<sup>22</sup> To Vanderhart, they are not just blessings but inclinations and callings based on the image of God inside of humankind. This teaching not only corresponds to the Jewish scholars’ ideas that the image of God has to do with the actions of God and the morality of God; it also envelops reason, free will, and creativity. Indeed, Vanderhart’s model combines the teachings of many Jewish and Christian scholars into one. An augmented list, therefore, may include traits as shown in Table 6.

**Table 7: Comparison of the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 1 and Genesis 9**

<b>Genesis 1:28</b>	<b>Genesis 9:1-2</b>
Be fruitful	Be fruitful
Multiply	Multiply
Fill the earth	Fill the earth
Subdue it	The fear of you and the dread of you shall be
Over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth	On every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move <i>on</i> the earth, and on all the fish of the sea.
Have dominion, rule	They are given into your hand

In Genesis 9:6, we find God affirming the *imago Dei* still resident in humankind after the Deluge – and their responsibility to make right moral choices because of it. God spoke to Noah in much the same way he spoke of humankind in Genesis 1, reiterating “in his own image God made humankind” (Gen 9:6, NRSV), for the second time connecting that image contextually to the dominion mandate. A cursory glance at the post-flood pronouncement to Noah and his offspring may make someone think it is different from

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22. Mark Vander Hart, "Creation and Covenant Part One: A Survey of the Dominion Mandate in the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (1990), 17.

the one pronounced over the first man and woman. However, a closer comparison of these two passages suggests much of the same tasks.

Thus the image of God, given to humankind at creation, was very much intact after the fall (see Table 7). The Dominion Mandate with its specific activities as expressed in Genesis 1 and 9 appears to be fundamental elements of human nature. Like animal instinct leads birds and mammals to feed, migrate, mate, and nest in the same patterns; so human instinct leads people to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and tame and take responsibility for the world around them. Those who do not respond to their inherent disposition will wrestle with their thoughts and feelings until they do so.

### **Community**

Imbedded in the nature of humankind is the inclination toward community as well. It is natural for us to produce and nurture others with like natures as we operate in our God-given traits. According to Ferguson, we see God's plan for relationships in action in the second chapter of Genesis where the first crisis was named -- aloneness.<sup>23</sup> The first thing God said was "not good" (Gen 2:18, NRSV) was the lack of relationship with another person. Ferguson points out the fact that this occurred before sin entered the world, which tells us that problems can exist even in a perfect world. The Bible tells us God made the woman and "brought her to the man" (Gen 2:22, NRSV) -- a deliberate action on God's part to fill the void caused by aloneness.

In Genesis 2, we find the creation of Eve was not the creation of an employee but of another *Imago Dei* who would (1) take away aloneness (v. 18a), (2) share the mission

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23. David Ferguson and Teresa Ferguson, *Never Alone* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 48.

(v. 18b), (3) remove former limitations/restrictions (v. 24a), (4) bring oneness, mutuality (v. 24b), and (5) experience safe, unashamed self-disclosure (v. 25). According to Plaut, Eve did not just represent the development of human sexuality. He wrote, “The creation of woman becomes in effect the beginning of man’s social history; man is able to fulfill his destiny completely and only as a social being.”<sup>24</sup> Vanier wrote, “In a community, we verbalise [sic] our mutual belonging and bonding. We announce the goals and the spirit that unites us. We recognise [sic] together that we are responsible for one another.”<sup>25</sup>

These qualities of God-ordained human relationships go beyond the marriage of husband and wife; they are essential qualities of healthy relationships with any person. Indeed, these qualities naturally lead to the development of a healthy community of faith and become a model for intra-church relations:

**Table 8: Qualities of Human Relationships based on Genesis 2 and their implication for building a healthy community of faith.**

Human Relationships (Gen 2)	Healthy Community of Faith
Remove Aloneness	Companionship
Share Mission	Missionality
Remove Limitations/Restrictions	Liberation
Bring Mutuality, Oneness	Assimilation
Experience Confident, Mutual Self-Disclosure	Openness

Jean Vanier, the founder of L’Arche communities in Europe, explains community in terms that are consistent with these five roles:

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24. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. (New York: Union American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 31.

25. Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Revised Edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 1999), 18.

### Companionship

“As all inner pains surface, we can discover that community is a safe place. At last some people really listen to us; we can, little by little, reveal to them all those terrible monsters within us, all those guilt feelings hidden in the tomb of our being.”<sup>26</sup>

### Missionality

“Each new community is called forth by God, so he inspires a particular man or woman or a group of people to respond to a specific cry or need of humanity...A community becomes truly and radiantly one when all its members have a sense of urgency in their mission.”<sup>27</sup>

### Removal of Limitations

“To enter into a new covenant and belong to a new people, a community with new values, we have to leave other people...When we come into community we give up something of ourselves, and the rougher elements of our personality will have to be left behind.”<sup>28</sup>

### Oneness/Mutuality

“Communion is based on some common inner experience of love; it is the recognition of being one body, one people, called by God to be a source of love and peace...It is an experience of openness and trust that flows from what is innermost in a person.”<sup>29</sup>

### Freedom to Be Oneself

“A community comes about when people are no longer hiding from one another, no longer pretending or proving their value to another. Barriers have come down and they can live together.”<sup>30</sup>

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26. Vanier, 27.

27. Ibid., 89.

28. Ibid., 71-72.

29. Ibid., 25.

30. Ibid., 24.

Within the context of narrative therapy, people need to be made aware of their innate qualities in *the Imago Dei* and the plan God has to transform them through healthy, supportive relationships.

### **Hindrances to Healthy Self-Concepts**

In spite of the intrinsic worth of humankind and God's provision for a community of faith, we all have problems. Some problems come from sources outside our control; some come from choices we have made. Having a problem is not always a sin, nor is it always directly caused by sin (i.e. the problem of being alone experienced by Adam). Problems that are forced upon us may have to do with general needs that we do not have the resources to meet. Those that come from our choices may have to do with unreasonable expectations, which is often the result of inexperience. Not knowing how to meet a need or to set reasonable goals is no more a sin than having the problem to begin with. Thus, sin is not the only problem people may have.

Though it is not necessary to examine the whole biblical concept, human experience, and traditional theologies of sin in this chapter, it is important that we address something that is closely related to sin: delusion.

### **Delusion**

Thomas C. Oden once wrote, "good judgment...has the power to penetrate self-deceptions."<sup>31</sup> Part of the process of using sound judgment in this way may be identifying

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31. Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings, Volume 3: Pastoral Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 39.

where the deceptions came from, for a lesser weight is given to some thoughts if we consider the source. For example, a lie from a child can easily be disarmed while a lie from a pastor may cause people to question their own perception of reality. Good judgment, then, often comes in the form of resource selection.

When a person has been deluded, though, they do not always know the source. In some cases, delusion does not appear to be the result of a deliberate act by an outside force. Sometimes people appear to believe untruths because they are looking for answers and the untruth is the only one available to them. Sometimes a person is misled because he or she has forgotten a critical bit of information. Sometimes he or she ignores critical information based on the information's perceived incongruity to his or her priorities, agendas, or values. Often, delusions are disseminated to the masses by the media because information gatekeepers think they are telling the truth. In many cases, delusions come from several sources and work together to give us the wrong impression.

Some Christians are quick to accuse the devil of being the author of all untruths, not differentiating between different forms of delusion. Theologians have not often addressed such issues as white lies, forgetfulness, or ignorance – focusing more on lies that attack our faith. Citing Jesus' words in John 8:44, Wesley wrote, "O you fools, did you suppose the devil was dead? Or that he would not fight for his kingdom? What weapons will [the devil] fight with if not with lies? Is he not a liar and the father of

lies?”<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther complained that the devil “laboureth to extinguish my faith by wiles and subtleties; that is to say by lies, errors, and heresies.”<sup>33</sup>

Addressing delusions that attack our sense of morality, however, Ambrose held a slightly different opinion about error. He wrote,

The greater danger is not...from what is external to us, but from our own selves. Our adversary is within us, within us is the author of error, locked, I say, within our very selves. Look closely on your intentions; explore the disposition of your mind; set up guards to watch over the thoughts of your mind and the cupidities of your heart...Why do you summon an alien nature to furnish an excuse for your sins?<sup>34</sup>

C. S. Lewis, in his preface to the book *The Screwtape Letters*, took a position in the middle of both of these opinions:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.<sup>35</sup>

Though every person is responsible for his or her decision to separate truth from fiction, the person behind the delusion is not always easy to identify since truth is sometimes rather elusive itself.

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32. John Wesley, “Affirming the Faith: To the Law and to the Testimony! An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” 100, quoted in *The Essential Works of John Wesley*, ed. Alice Russie (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2011).

33. Martin Luther, *Select Works of Martin Luther: An Offering to the Church of God in the Last Days, Vol. I*, trans. Henry Cole. (London: T. Bensley, 1824), 259-260.

34. Ambrose, “Six Days of Creation: One, Second Homily” Chapter 7, No. 31, quoted in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Vol 42*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. John J. Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961), 35.

35. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1976), 17.



Some forms of delusion are caused by ignorance. We fail to grasp the truth because the truth is not even present. This does not make it any less dangerous than lies; but it does make people feel less guilty. Still, there is an element of culpability because we are ultimately responsible for our own knowledge – especially about ourselves. We are called to watch ourselves (Gal 6:1), examine ourselves (2 Cor 13:5a) and test ourselves (2 Cor 13:5b). If we do not do so, it is our own fault when our lack of self-knowledge deceives us.

Another form of delusion is caused by forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is different from ignorance. When we use forgetfulness as an excuse for delusion (i.e. “I forgot that Jesus set me free from that sin”), we think we are even farther removed from the world of blameworthiness. Yet a closer look at our forgetfulness tells another story. For most of us, we forget things not because we have a bad memory, but because we never set them as priorities in our thought life. I have seen this in the play productions I have done over the years. People may be great at memorizing sports stats or processes for accomplishing complicated tasks; but they claim they have “a bad memory” when I ask them to remember a few lines for a play. The most common excuse for such bad memory is “old age.” In reality, age has very little to do with forgetfulness; the best memorizers are people who care. This is the case with our memory of the truth. We do not deliberately ignore the truth so much as we incidentally disregard it. When a truth ends up as a side note, it does not recur in our thinking and is forgotten due to disuse. We forget because we are not prioritizing it, not paying attention to it, and not caring if we remember. Selective memory may be the culprit – or, more properly, non-selective memory due to indifference.

Because it requires an exchange of knowledge, dealing with ignorance and non-selective memory is risky business. “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1b, NRSV), which is a warning against the pride and arrogance surrounding the accumulation of knowledge. When a pastor seeks to educate people, there will inadvertently be people who are offended because of the implication that they are ignorant or lazy. They may have never learned what you are telling them; they may have forgotten something or deliberately disregarded something because they did not think it was important. Still they “know” the point you are making. They are not ignorant people. Nevertheless, they do not know as they ought to know.

Lies are a different kind of delusion. They are not just untruths or a lack of truth; they are deliberate attempts to deceive or to ignore the truth. They can be spoken by an oppressor (i.e. abusers and enablers), or, in the case of self-deception, created in our imagination. For a lie to occur, a person must first know the truth and then intentionally choose to either allow lies to come in or to keep truths out. In the parable of the sower, Jesus referred to lies as the first attack on people’s psyche as the word of God is sowed in their lives (Luke 8:12).

Remarkably, it is possible to lie by speaking only truth. The example I give to many people has to do with the hypothetical, accidental destruction of a porcelain elephant in my home. One day, after my wife leaves for a week-long retreat, I break the knick-knack while playing with my boys in the house. I immediately clean up the elephant and throw it in the trash. The next day, the garbage truck picks up the trash and takes it to sites unknown. When my wife returns home, she asks, “Where’s my elephant?” I then offer her three truthful statements, all with the intent to deceive: “I

don't know. It was there last week. I wonder where it is." This sort of distortion of the truth is what Satan used when he used Scripture to try to tempt Jesus in Luke 4:9-12. Of this episode, Calvin wrote, "Satan's malice should not escape us. He misuses the testimony of Scripture, to make the life (Scripture) deadly for Christ, or to turn bread itself into poison. He does not cease using the same trick daily."<sup>36</sup> Thus, even a quotation from Scripture can be used in a lie.

**Table 9: Common Untruths that Feed Our Problem Stories**

Hindrances to Healthy Relationships	Untruths (Lies and Ignorance)
Loss	If you cannot have perfection, your life is over
Pessimism	You are going to fail; you always do
Cynicism	You fail because there is nothing good about your life
Aloofness	Keep to yourself; you never know when someone will disappoint you
Shame	You are a dishonor to yourself, your family, and to your community

As we prepare to do battle with the enemies of our psyche, we need to recognize the basis of problem stories: a frame of mind that does not see the truth properly. Wherever it comes from, we need to treat it as the devil himself and give it no quarter.

**Table 10: Problem Stories and What They Say About Us**

Problem Stories	What They Say About Us
Perfectionism, Negative Imagination, Invidious Comparison, Riches, Pleasures	"I refuse to be happy until everything is perfect; I need riches; I need pleasures; I need good looks; I need a perfect body" (Chronic Sense of Loss)
Fear, Worries	"I am going to fail; I always do."

36. John Calvin, *Calvin: Commentaries*, ed. Joseph Haroutunian (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958), 165.

	(Pessimism)
Self-surveillance over Limitations, Internalized Bickering	“I need to continually look for excuses why I fail, like my psychiatrist/pastor/parents expect me to.” (Cynicism)
Illegitimacy	“I do not belong here” (Detachment/Aloofness)
Hopelessness, Discouragement, Shame	“I’m tired of trying; I am the sum of all my failures; I am hopeless, helpless.” (Chronic Sense of Shame)

The problem story is a delusion that has become chronic. Simply put, it is a delusion that people allow to define them. When people have problem stories, they see themselves as prisoners, locked in an endless loop of limitations and failure. The purpose of narrative therapy is not to help people overcome all of their problems; rather it is to help people restory their lives in such a way that they are no longer prisoners in their own minds. Stephen Madigan, in his book *Narrative Therapy*, identifies eight “internalized conversational problem habits” that can short-circuit people’s psycho-social growth: (1) self-surveillance, (2) illegitimacy, (3) fear, (4) negative imagination/invidious comparison, (5) internalized bickering, (6) hopelessness, (7) perfection, and (8) guilt.<sup>37</sup> In the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-20, Jesus Christ spoke of five kinds of self-talk that hinder the growth of the word of God in people’s hearts: (1) lies, (2) discouragement, (3) worries, (4) riches, and (5) pleasures. Some of these address the issues on Madigan’s list from a different perspective and some complement them. The first one, lies, is found in each of them. The remaining habits can hinder people from developing healthy relationships in the church. Table 10 classifies each of these as one of five basic themes: loss, pessimism, cynicism, detachment/alooofness, and shame.

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37. Madigan, 98-113.

Comparing the five traits of a healthy community of faith to the five problem story themes (hindrances), we may come up with a more complete understanding of internal hindrances to assimilation.

**Table 11: Hindrances to Healthy Relationships in a Healthy Community of Faith**

<b>Healthy Community of Faith</b>	<b>Hindrances to Healthy Relationships</b>
Removing Aloneness/Companionship	Chronic Sense of Loss
Sharing Mission/Missionality	Pessimism
Removing Limitations/Deliverance/Liberation	Cynicism
Bringing Mutuality, Oneness/Assimilation	Detachment/Aloofness
Fearlessness and Openness	Chronic Sense of Shame

#### Problem Story: Loss

The problem story of loss is the belief that perfection has been taken away. It can be the result of a divorce, the death of a loved one, or the end of a career. In churches that were once thriving, it can be the feeling that the golden years are behind them and nothing can bring them back. In these circumstances, people can only think of the perfection that was once theirs but is now beyond their reach. They may try to fill that void with riches or pleasures with the expectation that they may be able to resurrect it by these efforts; but this becomes an exercise in futility. To them, relationships are only the end to a means and can only be justified if others help reach their goal of recapturing Camelot.

The loss of perfection often appears in the form of a gut feeling of “less-than-worthiness,” a feeling of illegitimacy in which “persons can come to experience

themselves as refugees in their own lives, with nowhere to belong or feel safe.”<sup>38</sup> They may feel they do not measure up to a certain standard they have placed on themselves such as “I don’t pray an hour a day” or “I don’t show hospitality as well as I should.” Madigan writes of a young woman struggling with negative imagination/invidious comparison who said her thoughts were “holding court against her in just about every encounter.”<sup>39</sup> When people think this way, they continually imagine everyone and everything around them comparing them with the perfect person they “should be” and criticizing them for being half a person. Harassed by these thoughts, people do not think it is appropriate to initiate a relationship with other members of the body of Christ. “Why should they accept me?” they ask themselves, “I’m far from perfect.” They may be completely qualified to offer help, minister, or take a leadership position, but their hearts condemn them because they do not measure up to some grand expectation of what they should look like.

Feelings of loss and perfectionism lend themselves to a feeling of bereavement over perfection that they can never attain (or regain). Switzer observed, “The power of grief seems to be in two primary emotions: anxiety and grief.”<sup>40</sup> This accounts for the range of expressions among those who cope with loss by becoming depressed and those who do so by becoming perfectionists. Switzer wrote that, when we experience loss, we experience “what might be called a type of psychological death of our own...our own death inside.”<sup>41</sup> This is not an unnatural reaction to loss, for people will grieve and need

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38. Madigan, 101.

39. Ibid., 105.

40. David K. Switzer, *Pastoral Care Emergencies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 99.

41. Ibid., 99-100.

to be given adequate time to do so. However a chronic sense of loss is unhealthy. People who do not have help in coping with loss may become “locked into a state of anxiety or depression, confusion, a lack of decisiveness, relative helplessness, nonfunctioning or a low level of functioning.”<sup>42</sup> Switzer says they need quick and sensitive intervention from people in a community of faith.<sup>43</sup>

### Problem Story: Pessimism

Pessimism and cynicism are closely related to each other; but there is a difference between the two. The main difference is dedication. They are both deterministic because they see failure as a “lot in life.” Both are defeatist in that they see their lot in life as unproductive and/or valueless. However, pessimists tend to be neophytes in the world of doubt, while cynics may be considered professional skeptics. Cynics are skeptical of every good work or communication because of a system of logic they have created over time, while pessimists doubt individual good works or communications out of a gut feeling that things will go wrong. Even though we may be pessimistic for many years, the shift to cynicism may never happen for us because we have not become decisive about a philosophical basis for feeling the way we do. Cynics are more aggressive; they have an arsenal of reasons why life is terrible, sometimes using science, experience, or the Bible to support their claims. The Gloomy Gus and Negative Nancy in church may be either pessimists or cynics; the way to tell is by checking out their arsenal.

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42. Switzer, 44.

43. Ibid.

A key weapon of pessimists and cynics is doubt, which is one of the key enemies of faith in the Bible. The Greek *diakrino* can be translated as “doubt,” “judge,” “discern,” or “waver.”<sup>44</sup> It means “to judge between two.”<sup>45</sup> Contextually, it could mean to “weigh” the words of a prophet (1 Cor 14:29, NRSV), which is a wise thing to do. It could mean to see things differently than others (1 Cor 4:7), which is neither good nor bad. It could mean to “have doubts” about what to do (Rom 14:23, NRSV), which ruins people when they act within self-doubt. According to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, it means “to express disapproval of what someone has done—‘to criticize.’”<sup>46</sup> This is certainly what happens when we are pessimistic; we criticize a positive outlook. When we are pessimistic, we tip the balance in favor of failure.

Another word for doubt is *dipsychos*, which is Greek for “two-spirited” or “double-minded.”<sup>47</sup> It means “being uncertain about the truth of something.”<sup>48</sup> Kittel relates it to Ezekiel 14:3-5, when the Jews had set up idols in their hearts showing they had a divided loyalty.<sup>49</sup> James uses this word to explain, “The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind, for the doubter [is a] double-minded man and unstable in every way” (Jas 1:6-7, NRSV).

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44. James Strong, “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890), 22.

45. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 946.

46. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 33.412.

47. Strong, 24.

48. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 9, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 665.

49. Ibid.



The word translated as double-minded in Psalm 119:113 is *samek*, which means “divided or half-hearted.”<sup>50</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs connects this word to Elijah’s preaching against the nation of Israel because of their faithlessness: “How long will you go on limping between two different opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21, NRSV). Though translators of the Old Testament do not use the word “doubt” more than a few times, the Old Testament writers frequently call attention to hearts that vacillate between devotion and unfaithfulness. It is the unfaithfulness of the people, which begins with idolatry of the heart and ends in outright idolatry, that prompts God’s wrath. Double-mindedness is that spiritual state in which lip service may be at a premium, but hearts are far from God (Isa 29:13; Mark 7:6). Indeed, a double-minded person finds it difficult to know the truth about themselves.

When we experience doubt, we become afraid of the unknown. Chronic fear creeps in and, according to Madigan, conducts “a full accounting of all the many ways you will mess up...and all the many reasons why you should just give up on life.”<sup>51</sup> Inordinate attention is given to hypothetical scenarios. “What if they don’t like me?” “What if I don’t fit in?” “What if I don’t have what it takes and I make a fool of myself?” These are imagined excursions into situations that may never happen anyway. However, once we succumb to the fear, we retreat inside a shell for protection. Fear then condemns us for “being a coward.”<sup>52</sup> Christians with these habitual thought processes may enter into

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50. Francis S. Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic, Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1907), 704.

51. Madigan, 104.

52. Ibid., 103.

relationship with another churchgoer; but they will find it impossible to develop it into a deep, lasting connection.

### Problem Story: Cynicism

The word cynic comes from the Greek *kyon*, which means dog.<sup>53</sup> The word was applied to people who were vile and irreverent (Matt 7:6, Phil 3:2, Rev 22:15) as well as to people in the sect called Cynics. According to Eddy, a Cynic was one who “did his best to awaken the dullards of society to their pitiable state... through socially subversive means such as ‘shameless’ public behavior and offensively bold speech.”<sup>54</sup> Like stray dogs which are dubious of human relationships due to a history of abuse, so Cynics barked at social conventions because humans – especially human institutions -- had a track record of moral failure. Today, cynics are, at best, sarcastic when speaking of human virtue; at worst, they blatantly attack the dignity of God and God’s people based on a preconceived notion that they all must be morally flawed.

Just as cynicism is an aggressive form of pessimism, so scorn is an aggressive form of doubt. Scorn is the main weapon of the cynic. One Hebrew word for scornfulness is *lewts*, which means to “to stammer...to deride, to mock anyone, probably by imitating his voice in sport.”<sup>55</sup> The word literally means “to make mouths at” and is sometimes

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53. Paul R. Eddy, "Jesus as Diogenes? Reflections on the Cynic Jesus Thesis." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 3 (September 1, 1996): 449-469. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 12, 2013): 450.

54. Ibid., 452.

55. Gesenius, 435.

translated as “scoff.”<sup>56</sup> This highlights one of the key differences between pessimism and cynicism. Scorners “delight in their scoffing” (Prov 1:22, NRSV), which is observable in how easily cynics find pleasure in their derision of goodness. They respond to correction with abuse and hatred (Prov 9:7-8). To be a scorner is to be a “proud, haughty person named ‘Scoffer’” and to “act with arrogant pride” (Prov 21:24, NRSV). Being scornful is dangerous business, for the scorner “seeks wisdom in vain” (Prov 14:6, NRSV), which is clear in how quickly cynics jump to conclusions that are superficial and often misguided. We are warned to expel the scoffer (Prov 22:10) and to avoid assuming their position (Psa 1:1b). “Toward the scorners [God] is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor” (Prov 3:34, NRSV). Thus, a scorner cannot know the favor of God.

Scorn is one of the favorite tools of religious people, which is probably why few theologians address it. Skepticism and cynicism are wielded in a pseudo-religious way to make the scoffer look more spiritual. Indeed, religious cynics often rise in power in an undiscerning church because their swagger is perceived as transcendent or profound thinking. They are stone-throwers at church – not necessarily like the religious elite; more like little children who throw stones at abandoned buildings and then run away. When the stone-thrower sits on a board, he or she serves as a naysayer, casting doubt rather than vision and short-circuiting the impact and future of the church. In a Pentecostal/Charismatic church, they often claim to be prophets, even though their words do not profit anyone.

A problem story of scorn is a habitual world of skepticism and cynicism that believes criticism and condemnation are virtues. It is an oppressive spirit which cannot

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56. James Strong, “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary,” in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1890), 59.

think of any other way to relate to others than to restrict them and to keep them in bondage to a negative opinion. They are bound by this same oppressive spirit, continually arguing within themselves over their own motives, second-guessing themselves, and presiding over a court within their own psyche which derides them at every turn and decides their fate before they take any action at all.

Madigan described this mindset in two ways: internalized bickering and negative self-surveillance. On the one hand, they are confounded by the “paralysis of analysis;”<sup>57</sup> on the other hand, their minds are crowded by an internal “negative paparazzi view” or “campaign of gossip”<sup>58</sup> Both of these lead people to short-circuit their own lives because they do not want to make the wrong decisions about every little detail lest others criticize them. This problem story keeps us from moving forward and experiencing life because we are continually filling our minds with – or as Madigan puts it, traps us inside – a hundred different positions about what to do.<sup>59</sup> It disconnects us from relationships out of fear of what you think others think you think.<sup>60</sup>

### Problem Story: Aloofness

Aloofness is a state of mind in which a person is “apart...distant in sympathy, interest, etc.”<sup>61</sup> It is a mannerism that reserves loyalty and preserves energy out of a desire for self-preservation and/or out of a gut feeling that the person does not really

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57. Madigan, 106.

58. Ibid., 100.

59. Ibid., 107.

60. Ibid., 100.

61. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, Deluxe Second Edition*, ed. Jean L. McKechnie (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 51.

belong. Today, such coldness is a mantra in people who put up walls to keep themselves from being hurt or from being asked to contribute more to relationships than they are willing to. They do not belong, because belonging requires giving up individuality. There are existential risks involved in belonging.

Aloofness is also a mantra in people who feel they do not belong because they are superior to others. Often, these people try to force others to accept them, accomplishing grandiose tasks in an attempt to prove themselves in undeniable ways. They may throw money at them or serve them in an over-the-top fashion. However, they are not interested in forming connections and use acknowledgement as a substitute for relationships. No matter how hard they try to legitimize themselves to others,<sup>62</sup> they always end up frustrated because nobody welcomes them. Even if people affirm their service or gift, they are still disconnected and relationally empty. They think others see them as illegitimate children in God's family, because others do not seem to recognize their true value.

The word aloof is used a few times in the Bible, translated from the Hebrew *neged*, which means "a spatial position in front of another object, but with a space between."<sup>63</sup> It is used by Obadiah in his prophecy against Edom: "On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off [Judah's] wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them" (Ob 11, ESV). It is an attitude that says, "It's none of my business," which is as bad as committing the act of violence itself. It is tied to indifference and self-importance.

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62. Madigan, 103.

63. James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew Old Testament* (Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 5584.

Aloofness is often a component of unforgiveness (though not always so). People get burned and feel that the only way to keep from being burned again is to keep others at arm's length. Unforgiveness becomes a problem story when we hold onto an offense to our detriment. Our sense of propriety tells us that someone must pay for the offense, yet no one is more responsible for seeing justice done than we are. By letting go of the grudge, we think, there may never be adequate compensation for the loss accrued. Meanwhile, the offense becomes imbedded in our self-identity. In our minds, we are no longer the people we were created to be; we are not as productive, not as developed, not as advanced, not as nurturing, and not as in control as we could be. We were violated, even desecrated.<sup>64</sup> We are victims. We think we will never be whole, never be able to get on with our lives.

If we do not let go, the offense will kill us. It turns us into indifferent, self-important people who require compensation before we enjoy healthy relationships. We stay aloof to protect ourselves. Because most offenses are never compensated, that means we live our lives in spiritual sickness with no one close enough to take away the pain.

### Problem Story: Guilt/Shame

The final problem story we need to examine is shame, which Madigan associates with guilt and social control.<sup>65</sup> Shame is a “disturbed or painful feeling of guilt,

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64. Virginia Todd Holeman, et al. “The Multidimensional Nature of the Quest Construct Forgiveness, Spiritual Perception, and Differentiation of Self,” *Journal Of Psychology & Theology* 39, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 31-43, accessed November 18, 2013, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, 33.

65. Madigan, 113.

incompetence, indecency, or blameworthiness.”<sup>66</sup> It is sometimes the sorrow we feel when someone does something to humiliate us.<sup>67</sup> In the Bible, shame is sometimes spoken of as an appropriate feeling when people have done something wrong (Luke 14:9, 1 Cor 6:5, 1 Pet 3:16). This, Park calls “discretion shame” and is a healthy type that “everyone should experience.”<sup>68</sup>

Christians in the postmodern world suffer from undue shame because of expectations society places on them. They often cannot enjoy others’ company without wondering if their actions or speech are caused by “what” they are. They have turned themselves into a subject instead of a person – what Foucault called the third phase of “objectification.”<sup>69</sup> Some people walk around with the label “introvert,” “ADHD,” or “recovering alcoholic” tattooed across their meta-awareness and cannot seem to shake the thought that they will never be anything else. Their negative label defines them and shames them to the point that any attempt to set them free is futile.

A person suffering from hopelessness is much like the one frozen by fear. In fact, it may actually be the next stage toward a total disconnect from people altogether. Hopelessness is a defeatist view of life that shuts down every positive support and every alternate narrative. It is impossible to think of anything else but the problem. There is no solution; only an agony that cannot be removed. Madigan writes, “It is a surrender to the belief that all hopeful experience and stories that live outside the problem frame are

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66. *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, Deluxe Second Edition*, ed. Jean L. McKechnie, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 1667.

67. Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 36.

68. *Ibid.*, 38.

69. Madigan, 43.

meaningless.”<sup>70</sup> Churchgoers who think this way may experience a heightened awareness of their inadequacy and lack of resources to solve the problem, a feeling of complete burnout, or a sense that there is no use in trying anymore. Some may go so far as to contemplate or attempt suicide. Healthy relationships are impossible; there is only despair. Hopelessness creates what Madigan calls a “paralysis of belief and performance.”<sup>71</sup>

In each of these cases, Christians can feel immobilized by the injurious internal conversations they have with themselves. Indeed, they are bullied by them – like inner demons. They view themselves as prisoners of their thoughts. Indeed, as problem stories take a center role in their unfolding dramas, the unhealthy self-perception distorts their understanding of scripture, hinders their spiritual formation, and reduces their usefulness in ministry.

The guilt we feel after sinning is a natural consequence of our failure to either (1) do what we know is right or (2) stop what we know is wrong. It comes from empathy, which is an essential ingredient in healthy human relationships. An empathetic person will naturally feel sorrow when a relationship is marred by wrongdoing. With a healthy amount of sadness/guilt, we are compelled to alleviate it by making amends – which is an essential ingredient in repentance. Repentance from moral failure is not just feeling sorry, but changing one’s mindset. Repentance from failure that negatively impacts those we should love is necessary for us to make things right, whether that means reconciling with

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70. Madigan, 108-109.

71. Ibid., 109.



each other or with God. Paul wrote, that “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret” (2 Cor 7:10, NRSV).

Conversely, Paul pointed out that there is an improper role for the sorrow of guilt: “worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor 7:10, NRSV). Deadly sorrow is disproportionate shame – shame that becomes the problem story, or the definition of the person -- which is not just a tool of the world but also, regrettably, of many in the church. While good grief motivates people to do better, undue shame immobilizes them. It tears people down by casting them forever in the role of loser. It makes them the sum of their failures. Chronic shame is part of what Park identifies as *han*, “the slow death of the soul...sadness, resignation, hopelessness, and despair.”<sup>72</sup>

The problem story of shame can be projected onto people by society, religious leaders, or themselves. It can lead people to foment such a sense of despair that they may punish themselves with violence or to sabotage themselves in a passive aggressive way (i.e. by setting themselves up for failure). It keeps people from connecting to others for fear that they will find out how dreadful they are. Park wrote, “Shame involves discomfort in facing others because of one’s own vulnerability.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, sin produces even more victims in its wake.

### **Overcoming Problem Stories**

Paul addressed the need to “take every thought captive” (2 Cor 10:5, NRSV) in order to overcome false accusations that would hinder his ministry in the Corinthian

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72. Park, 10.

73. Ibid., 35.

church. Thoughts, to Paul, were like untamed animals or encroaching enemies that needed to be taken into custody and domesticated. Overcoming untruths is a process that requires deliberate action on the individual's part, the assistance of a community of common transformation, and revelation from God through a growing relationship with the Creator.

### Through Deliberate Action

Putting too much emphasis on ourselves can too easily lead to self-centeredness, which Erasmus,<sup>74</sup> Bonhoeffer,<sup>75</sup> and many other Christian theologians warn about. Nevertheless, we must apply good judgment, if we are going to penetrate our delusions.<sup>76</sup> Wesley wrote, "Be not afraid to know all this evil of thy heart, to know thyself as also thou art known. Yea, desire of God, that thou mayest not think of thyself more highly than thou oughtest to think."<sup>77</sup> A correct way of thinking about ourselves must be developed.

In his article *Truth Is Proportional*, Michael Lindvall says, "some truths about God are more importantly true than others."<sup>78</sup> In so writing, he introduces an important point as we seek a solution to chronic, unhealthy self-talk. Could it be that some truths

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74. Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus, Selected by William Barker I.VI.95*, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc. 2001), 97.

75. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 2: Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 138.

76. Oden, John Wesley's Teachings, 39.

77. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley in Ten Volumes, Vol. 5* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1826), 79-80.

78. Michael Lindvall, "Truth Is Proportional: The Limits of What We Can Know," *Christian Century* 129, no. 8 (April 18, 2012): 12-13. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2014), 13.

about ourselves are more importantly true than others? We need to choose what truths we give priority to and which ones need to take a back seat.

Chronic negative self-talk is a habit we form over time because of continual passivity in allowing lies to pervade our thinking. It typically forms when we experience a disappointing or traumatizing event for which we have no healthy way to cope. For lack of a better way, we choose a coping mechanism that induces more harm on us (i.e. denial, self-blame, avoidance, or escape). We find a certain pleasure in these coping mechanisms, even though they may deepen our inability to cope. Because of our passivity in allowing these thought patterns to remain, these then become a sort of *modus operandi*, which influences our development as social agents.

Because chronic negative self-talk is so linked to spiritual laziness, we need to be decisive about how we combat it. As with any habit, we must be deliberate in order to be free of it. Paul wrote that we should no longer be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). Worldly patterns are habits that we are conditioned by our culture to approve and adopt. The remedy, to Paul, is to renew our minds on purpose, consciously choosing to replace the old, unhealthy patterns with new, healthy habits of the mind.

**Table 12: Spiritual Remedies to Spiritual Problems with the Symptom of a Problem Story**

<b>Problem Story (Symptom)</b>	<b>Spiritual Problem</b>	<b>Spiritual Remedy</b>
Loss	Unreasonable Expectations	Surrender to God's Opinion and Expectations
Pessimism	Doubt, Fear	Be Decisive about God
Cynicism	Skepticism, Arrogance	Humble Self
Detachment/Aloofness	Indifference, Self-Importance	Forgive, Show Empathy
Shame	Undue Humiliation and/or Unrepentant Sin	Receive Forgiveness

The solution becomes clearer when we consider problem stories to be symptoms of corresponding spiritual problems. One of our first steps to recovery, before we include the church, is to put an axe to the root of the problem and make a conscious effort to rid ourselves of the ignorance and lies. We need to make it a priority.

Anderson points out that we shape ourselves by adopting new habits of loving, acting morally, and worshipping.<sup>79</sup> To develop habits of healthy self-talk, it is necessary for us to intentionally think of ourselves the way God sees us – specifically as God created us – as agents of productivity, growth, expansion, development, and responsible leadership. We need to willfully agree with God that we are capable of finding companionship, sharing mission, removing our limitations, feeling a sense of oneness, and experiencing safe self-disclosure with others who are so created. Our understanding of the truth needs to be crafted by our own investment in reading and learning the Word of God. According to James Emery White, “Truth is that which corresponds with God’s knowledge.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the “word of their testimony” (Rev 12:11) is said to be one of the primary agents in overcoming evil. In Wesley’s Explanatory Notes on Revelation 12, he identifies the word of their testimony as “the word of God.”<sup>81</sup>

We need to combat the tendency toward doubt by being decisive about our relationship with God – choosing to trust and love Christ every time doubt and fear enter

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79. Anderson, 26.

80. James Emery White, *What Is Truth? A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006).

81. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on Revelation 12:11*, accessed May 12, 2014, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/revelation/revelation-12.html>.

our minds. We need to seek humility in such a way that false humility – the internal scorn we throw upon ourselves – gives way to a teachable spirit. When we perform these tasks, three of the five problem stories do not stand a chance, for we enter into an organic relationship with the Lord that dispels fear, doubt, perfectionism, legalism, pessimism, and cynicism.

The last two spiritual remedies are tied closely to one another by the thread of empathy. On the one hand, we need to put to death self-importance, indifference, and unforgiveness by caring about the spiritual well-being of others. On the other hand, we need to seize the forgiveness and freedom from shame that is offered free through Christ. (*I would use the term “receive,” but “seize” is a more active verb and perhaps more appropriate here.*) We need to establish our value in building up rather than tearing down – whether that means building others or ourselves.

Certainly, forgiveness is a sensitive subject. Pope claims, “True forgiveness is not a form of unconditional acceptance that issues a ‘blank check’ to the oppressor.”<sup>82</sup> If it was, he says, the forgiver would be as guilty of injustice as the oppressor is. Rather, it is about not letting shame become a problem story for anyone. A shame problem story bars people from being restored, for it keeps them aloof – at arm’s length – where repentance and reconciliation cannot take place. Forgiveness is about restoration – in some cases, continued fellowship despite a minor offense. In the case of major offenses, it means a second chance for the sake of healing. Jesus established this as one of the foundational elements of discipleship: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and

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82. Stephen J. Pope, “The Convergence of Forgiveness and Justice: Lessons from El Salvador,” *Theological Studies* 64, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 812-835. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 12, 2013).

you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37, NRSV).

Unforgiveness passes judgment on people, constructs a negative self-identity for them that we expect them to live in, and creates an “us versus them” mentality. It is the desire to impose a shame problem story on another person. Forgiveness sees the person as a person, valuable because of his or her humanness, and the problem as a thing apart from the person. Park wrote, “Forgiveness allows room for error, sin, or failing. This means that we keep our feelings about the offenders’ sin and mistakes separate from our perspective about their persons.”<sup>83</sup> When we approach victimization in this way, we can forgive – not on the basis of our subjugation to the offender but on the basis of our desire for community.

Suchocki pointed out that forgiveness requires empathy, which frees people to wish for the well-being of the offender. She wrote, “Forgiveness is the substance of human hope.”<sup>84</sup> Kurtz and Ketchum claim that forgiveness means dispelling resentment and putting a stop to a victim self-identity.<sup>85</sup> Bonhoeffer explained that forgiveness is the mark of the perfect church. Indeed, he wrote that the perfect church is not a place where people think they need to be perfect but a place where devotion is tested and proved by learning to forgive one another. He wrote, “The very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither

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83. Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2004), 87.

84. Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 153.

85. Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketchum, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Modern Wisdom from Classic Stories* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 213-229.

of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together – the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.”<sup>86</sup>

Malcolm and Ramsey found that people benefit from narrative therapy because of the length of time it gives to people to develop the agency to forgive:

We have found narrative therapy especially helpful for creating the space and time people require to forgive. Narratives...enable us to order the events of our lives, making logical our past, present, and future experiences. In situations of unforgiveness, time has become problematized: the past is too grievous to remember, the present is filled with pain, and the future is unimaginable. But narratives not only organize time, they give meaning to our experiences of time. Past memories are healed, patience for today is increased, and we begin to envision a new future.<sup>87</sup>

Once the walls are down inside of us, we can begin to experience the relevancy of *communitas* in the body of Christ.

### Through Community

The church, as a culture of common transformation, is responsible for helping us overcome the delusions of problem stories by encouraging us and building us up (1 Thes 5:11). Paul taught the church in Ephesus to “sing songs and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves” (Eph 5:19, NRSV). He instructed the church in Colossae to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col 3:16, NRSV). We are called by the writer of Hebrews to “exhort one another every day, as long

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86. Bonhoeffer, 28.

87. Lois Malcolm and Janet L. Ramsey, "On Forgiveness and Healing: Narrative Therapy and the Gospel Story," *Word & World* 30, no. 1 (December 1, 2010): 23-32. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 6, 2013): 25.

as it is called ‘today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13, NRSV).

The church takes people who follow failure scripts in how they think, feel, speak, and behave, and immerses them in new scripts. It is a place where people can learn to think clearly about who they are and how valuable they are to others in the body of Christ. In a community of faith, people learn to feel the way they should about being social people – people with God-given relational traits. As a member of the body of Christ, people learn to speak life into others and behave morally, the way God intended them to.

Anderson points out that the church is intended to school people in the habit of worship as well. He wrote,

We need to recover an understanding of [worship] as...the primary formative and transformative practice of the church, through which we offer ourselves to God with all that we are, in which we encounter the tangible, tastable, love of God for the world, and by means of which we are compelled to loving service in the world...In Christian worship, we ‘work the earth of the heart,’ cultivating and nurturing its growth. In Christian worship, we live into, by way of prayer, song, silence, word, bath, and meal, a habit of holiness. In Christian worship, in this ‘school for the Lord’s service,’ we come to inhabit the place and practice of Jesus.<sup>88</sup>

From a theological standpoint, it is through the Holy Spirit that we commune with God. In that communion, we receive the blood of Jesus which “cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7, NRSV) and is a pivotal element in overcoming the evil one (Rev 12:11). In that communion, we receive revelation, the depths of which Jesus called “all the truth” (John 16:13, NRSV) and which Paul perceived was “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16,

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88. Anderson, 31-32.



NRSV). Paul wrote, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9-10a, NRSV). These revelations provide us with one of the most powerful weapons for the dismantling of problem stories.

Because transformation cannot be done in a vacuum, it is necessary for therapy to be contextualized. This is another way narrative therapy differs from many other treatments. Relationships are where problem stories are created, supported, and corroborated; but they are also where alternative themes help set people free. In structuralist psychiatric settings, problem stories are generally considered the client’s word against the psychiatrist’s. If the client is to have an alternate story, the psychiatrist has to fabricate it – forcing what is potentially a second delusion on the client instead of helping the client identify true alternate themes. In narrative therapy, relationships are part of the solution.

For the purposes of this paper, I define the church as a culture of common transformation where worship of God and love of humankind are paramount. Transformation comes from being connected to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, renewing the mind through the Word of God, and actively applying the Word of God to one’s lifestyle. Within this sort of culture, a community of concern, which is a necessary part of the transformation of newcomers, is birthed. A church is a support group, which surrounds new believers with a sense of belonging and washes them with words that continually contradict unhealthy self-talk. A church must be a place where true transformation is not the exception but the rule.

People who go into narrative therapy without the support of their closest friends or family members tend to have greater obstacles than those who do not. In order for people to sustain their re-authored life stories, the church must be supportive of their transformation. It helps if the church members have been transformed, themselves. If members have already been through the liminality phase (a phase Turner describes as one “likened to death”<sup>89</sup>), have re-authored their lives according to the more important truth, their willingness to be part of a transformational support system is organically driven. This sort of spiritual family is vital. Bufford and Johnston pointed out that the church is a prime example of an organization that can promote mental health through primary prevention by helping people find “purpose or meaning for the experiences of life...[and]... support systems and natural caregivers”<sup>90</sup> that help the person develop healthy coping strategies. Bufford and Johnston also claimed the church offers tertiary prevention by providing “reintegration into normal or nearly normal functioning in the community.”<sup>91</sup> They wrote, “A major factor in tertiary prevention is the willingness of the community to accept the person, with their past failures and present limitations, and to provide them with the social and instrumental supports necessary to facilitate return to effective functioning in the community.”<sup>92</sup>

If the church is to function as it should, its members must be committed to helping people dispel the propaganda of their problem stories. As long as the church sees itself as

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89. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 95.

90. Rodger K. Bufford and Trudi Bratten Johnston, "The Church and Community Mental Health: Unrealized Potential," *Journal Of Psychology & Theology* 10, no. 4 (December 1, 1982): 355-362. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 18, 2013), 356.

91. Ibid., 355.

92. Ibid., 357.

only an “area of common living” (how Turner defined community),<sup>93</sup> problem stories will remain a cancerous secret -- nobody’s business but the newcomer’s. Instead, the church needs to be a *communitas* – a place of belonging, a culture of common transformation, and a community of concern that makes the well-being of its members everyone’s business.

Transformation must happen within the context of relationships. Brad Waggoner, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay Research, said,

In our three studies related to church attendance practices...one thing is abundantly clear. Relationships are often the glue that keeps people in church or serves as the attraction to begin attending again.<sup>94</sup>

It is in this formative and transformative experience that people walk in healthy relationship with their Creator and receive the ultimate tool for combating their problem stories. Okure wrote,

In community as I hear you read and interpret the Scriptures and you hear me read, I may gain insight from you and you may gain insight from me. We learn from one another. The Bible is essentially a community book, written for people living in communities of faith, and no passage of Scripture is subject to private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:19-21). We need to read together to be able to help one another see with new eyes; what our cultures may blind us from seeing, people from other cultures can help us to see more clearly in the light of the gospel..<sup>95</sup>

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93. Turner, 96.

94. Scott McConnell, *Reasons 18- to 22-Year Olds Drop Out of Church*. (Nashville: LifeWay Research, August 7, 2007), accessed October 1, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

95. Teresa Okure, "What is truth?", *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (June 1, 2011): 405-422. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost(accessed October 28, 2014): 405.

In the case of all Christians, no one's story is his or her own. We are all stewards of a story of redemption in which God is the main character and we are the object of Christ's affection. By the end of the narrative therapy process, every person's testimony can be retold in light of God's care for him or her before, during, and after being found. Whether that testimony concludes with conversion or with a certain level of deliverance in the sanctification process, it tends to focus on the same theme. It may tell of a dark past, a traumatic event, or a life of privilege in a good family, but it will always end the same: "God is always there for me." Thomas C. Oden wrote, "Something of my personal story, I find to my amazement that others mention with great feeling that they too have experienced something analogous and that my story has helped them see what has happened to them."<sup>96</sup>

The reason all Christians' stories are the same is because the story of every Christian is the Gospel. In its most basic form, the Gospel is the nearness of God to those who call on the Lord. Even before we called, God was speaking to our hearts with whatever level of revelation we could understand. As we grew in teachability, with the help of the *Imago Dei* inside of us and the assistance of the community of faith which God provided, we took more of our thoughts captive and brought them into subjection to the purposes of Christ. Malcolm and Ramsey wrote: "Transforming us into Christ's image, the Spirit reauthors the stories of our lives, giving us the 'experiential wisdom' to

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96. Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), accessed September 14, 2013, from [http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter\\_id=1737](http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1737), p. 3.

interpret our experience of lived time—our past, our present, our future—in terms of God's judgment and promise.”<sup>97</sup>

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97. Malcolm and Ramsey, 31.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Faith Church is not the only sick church in America. Many believers remain unchurched, nomadic, or uninvolved in a local community of faith. Though many believe they should reach the lost, they do not. Though many call themselves Christians, many do not seem to know what that means or what church is all about. Many who attend church wrestle with internal conflicts that the church is not alleviating. These statements, though painful to read, are supported by a wide range of studies, which also help inform this project.

In an online study of 1,200 young adults conducted by LifeWay Research in August 2009, only 23% of Millennials attended worship services once a week or more,<sup>1</sup> even though 65% considered themselves Christians.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that nearly half of all Christians in that age group did not regularly attend church. Of those who claimed to have trusted Christ as their savior (a subset of those who *considered* themselves Christians), 33% rarely or never attended church<sup>3</sup> and 53% rarely or never took part in small group Bible studies.<sup>4</sup> In a previous LifeWay Research study in 2006, 20% of young

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1. Rob Phillipson, *American Millennials Are Spiritually Diverse* (Nashville: LifeWay Research, April 27, 2010), accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-American-millennials-are-spiritually-diverse>. [PowerPoint]: 14.

2. Ibid., 5.

3. Ibid., 15.

4. Ibid., 17.

people who dropped out of church claimed they “didn’t feel connected to the people in my church.”<sup>5</sup> The problem is stated by LifeWay researchers: “Young adults are longing for community and fellowship with peers, looking for ways to reach people in need and circling the church but not always finding a home in it.”<sup>6</sup>

Theoretically, the church should be a place where anyone in today’s world could find a home. The church, like postmodernists, embraces multiculturalism because it sees people of every tribe and language and people and nation as equals (Rev 7:9). The church welcomes diversity because it is in a variety of giftings that we enrich ourselves and our relationships with others (1 Cor 12:4-30). Tolerance is one of the basic tenants of the church, which receives people of every walk of life, forgives their sins, and baptizes them into one body (Gal 3:28). This generation is ripe for a model of ministry that builds community while it celebrates diversity.

However, most Christians do not even know who they are or what a Christian community of faith should look like. In a recent Barna poll (2013), only 64% of Protestants agreed that they have a responsibility to tell other people about their religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> In another poll, Barna found that 81% of self-identified Christians agreed that

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5. Scott McConnell, *Reasons 18- to 22-Year Olds Drop Out of Church* (Nashville: LifeWay Research, August 7, 2007). Accessed October 1, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

6. Libby Lovelaceon, *New Church View of Young Adults*. (Nashville: LifeWay Research, December 5, 2006), accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-the-new-church-view-of-young-adults>.

7. Barna Group, *Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?* (December 18, 2013), accessed March 23, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/648-is-evangelism-going-out-of-style#.VEp0iPnF-kQ>.

spiritual maturity has to do with “trying hard to follow the rules.”<sup>8</sup> Only 13% claimed spiritual maturity meant “possessing concern about others.”<sup>9</sup> According to a Barna poll conducted in 2000, 21% of born again Christians “have heard of spiritual gifts but do not believe God has given them one.”<sup>10</sup> Another 20% claimed they did not know whether they had a spiritual gift. In an updated survey (2009), the percentage of those who did not think they had a spiritual gift rose to 28%; and 20% claimed to have gifts that were not even listed in the Bible as spiritual gifts, including premonition and clairvoyance.<sup>11</sup> A poll by Pew Research conducted in 2010 showed that only 66% of people who called themselves Christians knew that Genesis was the first book of the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Barna Group’s *State of the Bible* poll (2013) showed that only 60% of self-identified Christians are active Bible readers. This lack of investment in Bible reading explains a lot.

It is no wonder that there are so many downhearted parishioners in our churches. In a study of 200 church members in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2010, nearly 7% of participants “feel sad most of the time.”<sup>13</sup> Another study of 135 church members in Chattanooga,

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8. Barna Group, *Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity* (May 11, 2009), accessed March 24, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/264-many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity#.VEp5vvnF-kQ>.

9. Ibid.

10. Barna Group, Ltd. *Awareness of Spiritual Gifts Is Changing* (November 5, 2001, 2009), accessed October 16, 2014, [https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/32-awareness-of-spiritual-gifts-is-changing#.VD\\_N2PldWkQ](https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/32-awareness-of-spiritual-gifts-is-changing#.VD_N2PldWkQ).

11. Barna Group, Ltd. *Survey Describes the Spiritual Gifts That Christians Say They Have* (February 9, 2009), accessed October 16, 2014, [https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/211-survey-describes-the-spiritual-gifts-that-christians-say-they-have#.VD\\_SgPldWkQ](https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/211-survey-describes-the-spiritual-gifts-that-christians-say-they-have#.VD_SgPldWkQ).

12. PewResearch, *US Religious Knowledge Survey “Who Knows What About Religion”*, (September 28, 2010), accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey-who-knows-what-about-religion/>.

13. Vickie Marie Jester, *A Study of the Perceptions of Depression, Spirituality, and Treatment among African Americans: A Dissertation* (Atlanta: Clark Atlanta University, May, 2010, 89), accessed October 16, 2014, <http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1702&context=dissertations>.



Tennessee showed that 17% indicated “at least mild depression.”<sup>14</sup> These polls and surveys did not address the issue of clinical depression or other forms of mental illness; they simply pointed out the existence of intellectual and emotional afflictions within our churches’ spiritual experience.

Our churches are filled with lonely, hurting people, disconnected from each other, devoid of an identity, and at risk for dropping out. Still more are those who have already dropped out because the church did not rise up to remove their aloneness, give them purpose, set them free, build a sense of family with them, or provide a safe atmosphere for self-disclosure. Church is not a place where transformation takes place. According to a Barna poll, only 44% of those who attend church on a weekly basis say they experience God’s presence every week.<sup>15</sup> Church has not been the *communitas* that it was meant to be.

There are many programs designed to help people in their spiritual formation. Many are based on research that suggests journaling as a means of encountering God<sup>16</sup> or of tracking the socio-political nuances that affect our perception of reality.<sup>17</sup> Some are

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14. Katheryn Jane Klukow, *Depression and Evangelical Christian Spirituality: Exploring a Theoretical Model* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, May, 2012), 28, accessed October 16, 2014, <http://scholar.utc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=theses>.

15. The Barna Group, *What People Experience in Churches* (January 9, 2012), accessed December 15, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/congregations-articles/556-what-people-experience-in-churches>.

16. Helen Cepero, “Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive Writing,” *Formado Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

17. James F. Kay, “Full disclosure”, *Theology Today* 63, no. 2 (July 1, 2006): 145-149. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 7, 2015).

based on research that focuses on story-telling as a means of appreciating the self,<sup>18</sup> affecting culture,<sup>19</sup> or challenging prevailing ideologies.<sup>20</sup> Many of these programs have been helpful as discipleship tools and as agents of positive social change; but they can be problematic because they may (1) fortify problem stories rather than disarm them or (2) promote existentialism to the degree that they hinder the development of community. Narrative therapy stands out from others because of 1) its insistence on identifying people's problem-based thinking habits and making a clean, radical break from them and (2) its focus on community as a pivotal element in the recovery process.

### **Elements of Narrative Therapy**

The elements of narrative therapy and its value in restorying our churches' relational mosaic have already been discussed. A supportive framework of theory, then, should be our next course.

#### **Social Constructivism**

It may be easily construed that narrative therapy has, as its basis, social constructivism, which is the theory that people's understanding of reality is constructed through social situations. Many agnostic or atheistic constructivists claim that all truth –

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18. Faydra Shapiro, "Autobiography and Ethnography: Falling in Love with the Inner Other," *Method & Theory In The Study Of Religion* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 187-202. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 7, 2015).

19. A. Steven Evans, "Matters of the Heart: Orality, Story and Cultural Transformation -- The Critical Role of Storytelling in Affecting Worldview," *Missiology* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 185-199. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 7, 2015).

20. Susan VanZanten Gallagher, "Storytelling and Identity," *Christianity And Literature* 61, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 368-376. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 7, 2015).



Christian theorists, we try to understand enough of what is true so we can disarm the delusions that plague our minds and our world.

Indeed, Deulen claims that social constructivism is a “natural fit with a biblical approach to learning.”<sup>22</sup> She cites the 100 times the phrase “one another” is used in the Bible and the many admonitions in scripture to grow together as a body. This concept of growing together does not negate the existence of objective truth; it simply admits that, in our finite reasoning as humans, we need each other to grow in wisdom and knowledge of our savior. Bronfenbrenner suggested that social settings can serve as a “context for development [depending] on the existence and nature of social interconnections between settings, including joint participation, communication, and the existence of information in each setting about the other.”<sup>23</sup> Lowe and Lowe suggested that religious social systems operated as an ecosystem, which is a “series of interconnected parts, none of which can exist without the other [and] regulate the flow of inputs and outputs through the reciprocal forms of interaction and accommodation.”<sup>24</sup>

Becker’s Mosaic Model of Message Environments (1968) is designed to explain the concept of social constructivism in its purest form. He suggested that a person’s perception of reality is much like a three-dimensional mosaic would be pieced together

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22. Angela A. Deulen, "Social Constructivism and Online Learning Environments: Toward a Theological Model Christian Educators," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 93, accessed October 14, 2014, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

23. Urie Brofenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 6.

24. Stephen D. Lowe and Mary Elise Lowe, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 85-102. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2014), 87.

with many small tiles to form a comprehensible whole.<sup>25</sup> In the case of self-concepts, each experience influences our sense of self and contributes to an overall identity. In the case of our relationships, each experience contributes to our idea of what people are like, what they expect, etc. Everything we do, everything that is done to us, every word we speak, and every word spoken to us becomes another tile in a plethora of mosaics within our psyche. These tell us what reality is and what to expect in life.

In studies on the development of religious thinking, Fowler found that the developmental stage commonly experienced by adolescents produces a “synthetic-conventional faith” in which “faith is conformist...acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others.”<sup>26</sup> Though it is only stage three out of six, this developmental stage, according to Gottlieb, “becomes a permanent place of equilibrium for many adults.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this stage is necessary before deeper levels of spiritual development can occur.

Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl suggest that “children's thinking is not qualitatively different from that of adults. Rather, discrepancies between childish and adult thinking are due primarily to quantitative deficits in children's knowledge and experience.”<sup>28</sup> This may account for discrepancies between adults as well. In terms of our relational mosaic, the main difference between people's perceptions of self and relationships is the range of tiles that support healthy, mature perspectives. When we have more healthy experiences

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25. Samuel L. Becker, “Directions for Inter-cultural Communication Research,” *Communication Studies* 20, no. 1 (1969): 3-13.

26. Eli Gottlieb, “Development of Religious Thinking,” quoted in *Religious Education* 101, no. 2 (Spring, 2006): 247.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 251.

within the context of relationships, we will likely have a more complete and healthy conception of relationships.

Along the way, there are other hindrances to our development besides lack of experiences. Since the value we place on each individual experience will determine its relationship to other experiences in our mosaic, it is important to take note of how we evaluate our experiences. If we have a positive encounter with God or other people but do not assign a high value to it because it does not fit with the mosaic we are crafting about ourselves, that encounter will be of little effect. In fact, we may forget it ever happened. This is typical of people with chronic problem stories who forget to speak of their healthy relationships with God, spouses, children, or parents and ignore other positive parts of their stories such as academic or career achievements. If some facts about us are more important than others, it goes to show that a mosaic of self-perception that is devoid of important truths can easily become inadequate or delusional.

Children with ADHD often struggle with outside stimuli to the degree that they assign equal value to all the stimuli around them rather than on the teacher's words or other tasks at hand. This problem does not just belong to children with ADHD. Within the context of narrative therapy, a problem story is more or less caused by people assigning the same value to all truths they think they know about themselves. This can be dangerous at times when they are surrounded by their inadequacies and delusions. Assigning equal value to their weaknesses and their assets, they can easily tip the scale in favor of misery.

Dissonance occurs within our psyche when experiences tell a story that conflicts with the reality we perceive to be true. Stone wrote, "The psychic discomfort caused by

inconsistency -- that is between belief and behavior, or between expectations and reality - creates the need in individuals to justify or, in some other way, account for and therefore minimize the discrepancy."<sup>29</sup> If we have been filled with too much of the same delusion, we may not be ready to abandon the delusion in favor of one incidental experience with God or with others – even if the experience is pleasant. There is one thing we like more than reality: normalcy. When things are normal, we are comfortable. Even if a prison is normal, we prefer the prison to the frightening prospect of wide-open freedom.

Changing a person's mosaic of self and relationships is a painful experience. It takes patience to reassess or replace each tile with the reality of Christ. Because of the tenderness of such an operation, it has been suggested that it is best performed within the context of relationships. Vygotski developed this concept of a relational epistemology of faith formation. Kim wrote,

What bridges knowledge and faith is the influence that significant others have on the learner through koinonic (sic) encounters. Vygotskian scholars would describe this influence as semiotic mediation, which basically means intentional nurture whereby the spiritual reality of mature individuals (e.g., mentor, teacher, parent, etc.) is overtly passed on to the learner.<sup>30</sup>

### Communitas

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29. Jon R. Stone, "Prophecy and Dissonance: A Reassessment of Research Testing the Festinger Theory," *Nova Religio* 12, no. 4 (May 1, 2009): 73. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2014).

30. Jonathan H. Kim, "Cognition and Faith Formation: A Reflection on the Interrelationship of Schema, Thema, and Faith," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (September 1, 2007): 314. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2014).

In his seminal work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Victor Turner explains a deep sense of belonging and mutual concern among people groups that employ a rite of passage with three distinct phases: separation, liminality, and aggregation.<sup>31</sup> Through years of field work with the Ndembu of Zambia, he found that the elevation of people from childhood to adulthood and from ordinary citizenship to leadership contained these essential phases. The inductee began on the outside as an alien, disconnected from the tribe (separation). He or she then moved to the margin, where they existed in an ambiguous state – a sort of limbo -- between who they were and who they would soon be. It was in this state (liminality) that people were often stripped of their humanness, forced to forsake their identities, and subjected to long periods of isolation and abuse. Finally, the person moved into a consummated state where they experienced a combination of “lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship”<sup>32</sup> (aggregation). In reference to the sort of society that uses such rites of passage, Turner prefers the term *communitas* to community because it is more than an “area of common living;”<sup>33</sup> it is a culture of common transformation.

The rite of passage which creates *communitas* can be witnessed in many other societies besides the Ndembu of Zambia. In fact, Turner identifies the phase of liminality in Catholic monastic orders such as the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Dominican, which is what he calls the “pathway to salvation.”<sup>34</sup> He goes on to suggest it is even present in

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31. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 94.

32. Ibid., 96.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 198.



John and Charles Wesley “and their plain living and high thinking.”<sup>35</sup> This may easily be considered an exaggeration; however, there are similarities between the development of *communitas* as described by Turner and the corporate, spiritual formation experienced by members of a church. Churches grow as people on the outside move from their status as aliens to that of transformed members. As outsiders desire more profound experiences within the body of Christ, there is a transformation at the threshold between what they have been and what they will be. This requires the humbling of the self, acknowledgement of sin, and establishment of a right relationship with God. In this ambiguous state, people stand at the threshold of a new life that cannot be experienced until they die to sin. In many Christian traditions, praying the “sinner’s prayer” and baptism are rituals that symbolize this transformation.

Eventually, those who wish to move from regular churchgoer to leader in the church undergo a similar rite of passage. During the liminality phase, they are given tasks they may not like – menial or non-complementary. They are not paid more than a stipend, if they are paid at all. They are expected to serve the Lord without complaint, even though they are overworked, underpaid, and undervalued. Yet, if they stand the test, they are honed into a leader who is humble yet authoritative, autonomous yet committed to the body. They are holy but approachable, for they know what it is like to suffer. Whether these patterns of abuse are deliberate or not, they are common to many churches and easily recognized by pastors as the rite of passage every qualified minister must undergo. In fact, these rites of passage are necessary for the development of leaders in any community of common transformation, for all neophytes come from a variety of

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35. Turner, 198.

experiences and self-perceptions that can easily keep them disconnected from the pastor's vision and the overall mission of the church. They must die to these before they can live.

Whether people are moving from outsider to member or from regular attendee to church leader, it is during the liminality phase that they die to the old self-perception and are able to re-story their lives according to God's truth about them. This is part of the discipleship process. Once disciples make an aggressive break from their problem stories, restorying can take place and *communitas* can be attained.

Intrinsic to the proper execution of these rites of passage is an existing *communitas* that facilitates and informs the procedure. In narrative therapy, we may call it a community of concern, which provides support to the person and the process. This culture of common religious experience is a world where those being transformed can be immersed in God along with the transformed, forming one unified body. Of the development of *communitas* in the church, DeNeui wrote, "Communitas is a bond of oneness beyond ordinary community, an actual communion together that does not destroy individuality but brings alive the full gifts of each participant. It is a leveling process...yet accomplished in a setting that is accepting, life-giving, and unifying."<sup>36</sup>

By being immersed in this subculture, another form of transformation takes place: People learn new scripts. Silvan Tomkins developed Script Theory in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to explain why people speak, think, and behave the way they do. He called those short episodes in life that appear to have a beginning, middle, and end, "scenes."<sup>37</sup> A

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36. Paul H. De Neui, "Christian Communitas in the Missio Dei: Living Faithfully in the Tension between Cultural Osmosis and Alienation," *Ex Auditu* 23, (January 1, 2007): 102, accessed September 6, 2013, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

37. Silvan S. Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Adam Frank, Irving E. Alexander (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 180.

combination of scenes, he said, is the “plot of life.”<sup>38</sup> Over time, people develop patterns of thinking, feeling, speaking, and behaving. These are our scripts;<sup>39</sup> and, unless we make a cognitive decision to change, they are followed almost unaltered throughout our lives. Like changing the tiles in our mosaic, changing our scripts is a painful process because old habits are hard to break. Nevertheless, if our speech, thoughts, feelings, and behavior are detrimental to ourselves or others, we will find it necessary to adopt new ones. Immersion in the *communitas* of the local body is one way to develop these new scripts.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, immersion has been taught as a means to develop skills that cannot be adequately taught in the classroom. Second language learners pick up the language quicker when they are immersed in the culture.<sup>40</sup> Ministry students “integrate and balance the knowing, doing, and being domains of ministry” and gain “self-perception as a competent ministry leader” when they are immersed in real-life, full-time ministries.<sup>41</sup> Immersion works because it is “the whole person learning rather than just learning in the cognitive domain.”<sup>42</sup> When people immerse themselves in an experience, it does not matter what learning style they have – auditory, visual, or tactile. All learning styles are covered. Immersion is the fastest and most effective way to enculturate a person to a new way of life. This is true whether the enculturation is done

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38. Tomkins, 180.

39. Ibid.

40. Karen E. Lillie, Amy Markos, et al. “Policy in Practice: The Implementation of Structured English Immersion in Arizona,” *The Civil Rights Project* (Los Angeles: UCLA., July, 2010).

41. Luke S. Feters, “The PRIME Experience: Practical Research and Immersion in Ministry Effectiveness,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 198. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2014).

42. Peter Jarvis, “Religious Experience and Experiential Learning,” *Religious Education* 103, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 553. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2014).

into a positive or negative worldview. The goal, for the sake of healthy spiritual formation and social development, is to make a change toward a positive or, I should say, healthy way of life.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

At the beginning of this project, it was my hypothesis that feelings of disconnection in at-risk attendees at Faith Church could be changed through narrative therapy by restorying at-risk churchgoers' lives with an emphasis on five relational qualities shown in Genesis 2. These traits are, namely, the abilities to (1) remove aloneness, (2) share mission, (3) remove limitations, (4) share mutuality, and (5) experience safe self-disclosure. These qualities may be understood as encapsulating healthy relational mosaics.

#### **Triangulation of Data and Measurement Tools**

The framework for this study is qualitative. Six participants (three males; three 'females) of Faith Church, which represented approximately 25% of the church, were selected based on availability. Of these six, one was a female age fifty to sixty-eight (Baby Boomer), one was a male age thirty-one to forty-nine (Gen X), two were females ages thirty-one to forty nine (Gen X), and two were males below the age of thirty (Millenials). Each of these attendees was also a member of Faith Church. One began attending in 2013, one had left the church in 2013, and another was in danger of leaving because of the one who had left. Another, an adult, was a leader frustrated by the lack of connectedness seen in others.

Three sources of data were gathered between March and December, 2014. The first source was gathered through narrative research as the development of the subjects' autobiographical storytelling helped track any change in the at-risk attendee's self-perception and state of mind regarding their relationship with others in the body. Six individual sessions took place over a six to nine week period. As the pastor and researcher, I observed each participant and noted any attitudinal or behavioral changes during the course of the program.

A second set of ethnographic data was gathered through pre-program and post-program surveys administered to the entire congregation. This was designed to track any flux in self-perceptions that may have happened organically through normal church attendance and involvement. The participants in this program were chosen from among those surveyed; and their data was analyzed in relation to the rest of the congregation.

The third set of data was taken from pre-program and post-program interviews administered to participants. These interviews included fifteen questions made up of three sets of five. Each of these sets were designed to ascertain (1) practice in relation to the body of Christ, (2) sense of agency, and (3) sense of calling.

Recordings of each session were used to develop participants' stories and to identify the development of positive language as the participants talked about themselves in relationship to others in the church in the pre- and post-program interviews. A modified Osgood bipolar adjective measurement tool was used to identify elements of spiritual health and development by paying close attention to adjectives and other modifiers (i.e. adverbs and predicate adjectives). Osgood's theory of semantic differential suggested that attitudes can be measured quantitatively by recording people's responses

to a certain number of adjective pairs (i.e. good-bad, strong-weak, or pleasant-unpleasant) and attaching a score to these pairs on a numeric spectrum (i.e. a scale of 1 to 7).<sup>1</sup> To ensure the narrative aspect of this therapy was uninterrupted, however, people were not asked to respond to a set list of adjective pairs, but to speak freely about their lives. After transcribing the interviews, all modifiers were measured within their context, placing them into two essential categories: positive and negative.

My methodology included interviewing and counterviewing people in the hope that their modifiers would come organically out of the dialogue. It was my guess that asking people to use modifiers may have been counterproductive to the treatment because, by doing so, I would have been asking them to color their opinion of their life stories before treatment could be applied. It is my theory that, by the time a person starts coloring their story, they have already chosen an angle. (The objective in restorying is choosing a healthier angle to their life story.) To ask them to use more descriptive terms, however, may actually put them into a frame of mind that is too close to the problem story of self-surveillance. In order to gather more of an organic set of data, I allowed each participant to speak freely and without instruction about how they should answer.

All six sessions for each of the six people were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Narratives were extracted from these transcriptions to form the basis for a case study. The modified Osgood measurement tool was used to determine any change in the use of modifiers in the pre- and post-program interviews. The pre- and post-program interviews were also analyzed for flux in participants' sense of practice, agency, and calling. Data from the pre- and post-program surveys were compared for changes in self-

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1. Eugene F. McKenna, *Business Psychology and Organisational Behaviour: A Student's Handbook, 3rd Edition* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000), 272.

perception in relation to each participant's development as well as the organic development of the rest of the church body who did not participate.

Changes in the positive or negative responses to the post- and pre-program interview questions were also analyzed to determine if there was any flux in overall self-perception. One change in a person's answer may be considered normal and can be expected over the course of one six-month period. However, two or more changes may represent a shift in self-perception that is strategic. In fact, more than three changes would suggest a significant adjustment in a person's self-construct -- perhaps an adjustment that shows momentum and accelerated growth. Therefore, I suggest assigning values to each change on an accelerated scale. The first negative change (from positive to negative) would have a normal value of -1. The second negative change would have a value of -1.5. Likewise, the first positive change would have a normal value of 1, while the second positive change would have a somewhat heightened value of 1.5 but a third a considerable value of 2. This way, a person who changed negatively in one (which could reflect normal flux) but positively in two (which could reflect accelerated growth) would not be assessed as just having an accumulated flux score of 1 (the 1 and -1 canceling each other out) but as having a flux score of 1.5 -- crediting him or her with more than simply "normal change."

Transcriptions of the sessions, which total 487 pages of data, were collected and stored in a digital retrieval system. Only excerpts of the sessions (the pre-program and post-program interviews) were included in the appendix of this thesis.



## The Treatment

This study used the grounded theory of narrative therapy. Each participant was asked to tell a detailed “story of your life,” which was designed to reveal a theme based on his/her self-perception. Unhealthy themes (or angles) were represented as problem stories. Each participant was then counterviewed to uncover healthy alternate stories left out of the original narrative. During the six-week program, people were asked to talk about significant events, people, and ideologies that have impacted them. They were also asked to talk about chronic patterns of fear, shame, illegitimacy, etc. The last session was an opportunity for participants to retell their story (or restory) in light of significant truths they remembered about themselves.

In the first step of the process, I listened to each person as he or she told the story. This was not just good therapy; it was good pastoral care. Emma Justes, in her book *Hearing Beyond the Words*, points out that one of people’s deepest longings is to be connected to others, which takes place through active listening. Being listened to means “I see you”<sup>2</sup> perhaps for the first time, as a viable human being. Justes wrote, “In every area of ministry careful listening is a key to effective ministry.”<sup>3</sup> In Alice Morgan’s article *Beginning to Use a Narrative Approach in Therapy*, “having [the client’s] words in my mind makes it easier for me to decline invitations to hold the expert position in meetings with people that otherwise I may inadvertently take up.”<sup>4</sup> In each of the early

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2. Emma Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 51.

3. *Ibid.*, xv.

4. Alice Morgan, “Beginning to Use a Narrative Approach in Therapy,” *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 90, no.1 (2002), 87, accessed January 1, 2014, [www.dulwichcentre.com.au](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au).

sessions, I attempted to resist the urge to assume control of the conversation and, instead, let the story unfold with some questions designed to steer participants to self-discovery.

As the sessions continued, however, I respectfully led each person into truths that would enable them to overcome their problem stories. I focused on the practical application of truth as it pertained to their thought life: how they select the truths they do, what the important truths are, how to dismantle delusions, and how to minimize inferior internal chatter. Selecting truth is a choice people make every day of their thought life. Important truths are those which contribute to mental and relational health as defined in the Bible. Delusions are those thoughts, whether based on ignorance or a mishandling of the truth, which lead participants into detrimental thought patterns. Inferior internal chatter are incidental and irrelevant thoughts that clutter people's minds to the extent that they make it difficult to think clearly. I also focused on the identification of relationships in the body of Christ as resources for each participant.

Every attempt was made to reduce the participants' stress of feeling "pathologized." Being pathologized means being treated as an object that can be used to test a hypothesis.<sup>5</sup> It is analogous to Foucault's concept of objectification, which is the process of turning a person into an object to be studied rather a person to be heard.<sup>6</sup> De-pathologizing people is a key element that sets narrative therapy apart from many other forms of psychoanalysis. Therefore, the setting for each session was informal and often included snacks and other refreshments. The idea was to create an atmosphere in which my position as pastor and researcher was unobtrusive.

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5. Madigan, 16.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 10.

Because *communitas* cannot be built in a vacuum, it was important to include the rest of the congregation in the narrative therapy process as well. The spiritual transformation of the rest of the congregation needed to remain a concern of mine not only for their well-being but also for the well-being of the participants of the program. During the course of the project, I provided Biblical perspectives on self-image through two short series entitled *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* and *The Words People Say*. Worship music was selected specifically to focus on how God has restored our lives as children of God. Lyrics within these songs included the following:

“I’m trading my sorrow; I’m trading my shame; I’m laying  
them down for the joy of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

“Where there once was only hurt, you gave your healing hand.  
Where there once was only pain, you brought comfort like a  
friend.”<sup>8</sup>

“And now let the weak say I am strong; let the poor say I am  
rich because of what the Lord has done.”<sup>9</sup>

“You’ve taken my pain, called me by a new name. You’ve  
taken my shame and in its place, you give me joy.”<sup>10</sup>

Madigan uses letter writing campaigns to develop his clients’ communities of concern. With the client’s consent and guidance, he crafts a letter in which he explains

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7. Darrell Evans, *I’m Trading My Sorrows* (Passion Music, 1998).

8. Tommy Walker, *Mourning into Dancing*. Admin. Capitol CMG Publishing--IMI (Integrity’s Praise! Music, 1992).

9. Eustace Henry Smith, Jr., *Give Thanks*. Admin. Capitol CMG Publishing--IMI (Integrity’s Hosanna! Music, 1978).

10. David Brymer, *Restoration* (Forerunner Music, 2007).

the oppressive thoughts that have kept his client in bondage. The letter also asks for help to remind the client of aspects his or her life that the client may be forgetting – kindness or generosity the client has shown, social or spiritual impact, achievements, etc. These letters are then sent out to members of the client’s family or sphere of influence (the list chosen by the client). The result is often overwhelming as letters come in like a wave of positive support from dozens of humans and non-humans such as “family dogs, teddy bears, cars, dead grandparents, unborn siblings, and unknown movie stars.”<sup>11</sup>

### Research Questions

Based on the dominion mandate in Genesis 1:26, it was my theory that a healthy self-image is one in which people see themselves as God sees them: agents and stewards of (1) productivity (creativity), (2) duplicability (replication), (3) expandability (outreach), (4) ability to nurture (domestication), and (5) responsible governance (walking in spiritual authority). This is a potential outcome of the narrative therapy program; but it is not the primary objective. Based on the relational qualities of humankind shown in Genesis 2:18-25, it is my theory that healthy self-concepts will lead to healthy relationships with others. Thus, participants will see themselves as capable and called to (1) remove aloneness (companionship), (2) share mission (missionality), (3) remove limitations (liberation of others), (4) share mutuality (mutuality), and (5) experience confident self-disclosure (vulnerability). Agency has to do with capability, while stewardship has to do with calling and responsibility.

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11. Madigan, 118.

The pre- and post-program survey was designed to show how people and/or groups possess and/or develop these characteristics. Each person will respond to the following statements by circling “Agree” or “Disagree.”

- |  |       |          |
|--|-------|----------|
| 1. I am a creative person.                                   | Agree | Disagree |
| 2. I am a positive example to others.                        | Agree | Disagree |
| 3. I make a difference outside of my closest relationships.  | Agree | Disagree |
| 4. I am a nurturing person.                                  | Agree | Disagree |
| 5. I walk in authority.                                      | Agree | Disagree |
| 6. I am a good friend.                                       | Agree | Disagree |
| 7. I accomplish tasks with others.                           | Agree | Disagree |
| 8. I am a viable part of a unified body.                     | Agree | Disagree |
| 9. I am not afraid to share life stories openly with others. | Agree | Disagree |

Though answers to all of these statements will provide valuable information about possible changes in people’s self-perception, special attention will be given to numbers 2 and 6 through 9 because of their relational value within the local body.

A more in-depth understanding of the subjects’ self-perception was ascertained by a more complex series of interview questions. This phase of questioning addressed each of these ten characteristics to ascertain (1) practice in relation to the body of Christ, (2) sense of agency, and (3) sense of calling.

### Practice

1. How often do you contribute to the development of friendships within the church?  
(companionship)
2. How often do you accomplish a mission with someone else in the church?  
(missionality)
3. How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)
4. How often do you connect with others at church? (mutuality)
5. How often do you share something personal with someone you know from church? (vulnerability)

### Agency

6. How good of a friend are you? (companionship)
7. How do you work with others to accomplish tasks? (missionality)
8. How capable are you of helping others overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)
9. How do you feel about being a member of a unified body? (mutuality).
10. How comfortable are you with being vulnerable to others in your church?  
(vulnerability)

### Calling/Responsibility

11. Do you have an obligation to deepen friendships with people at church?  
(companionship)
12. Do you have an obligation to accomplish missions with others at the church?  
(missionality)
13. Do you have an obligation to help others overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)



50-68	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
<b>50-68</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
50-68	A	A	A	A	D	A	D	D	A
<b>31-49</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>31-49</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>31-49</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
0-30	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A
<b>0-30</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>0-30</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>

The all-affirmative survey responses of the older congregants (those born before 1952) present Faith Church with an enigma. If the responses are true, the pastor is a fortunate man. At least five mature men and women who attend Faith Church are everything that yields a healthy self-concept: They are creative, exemplary, outward-focused, nurturing leaders and friends who are missional and unified yet free to be themselves. The goal of this program is to produce more of these qualities in those who do not have them. However, part of the reason this program was established was to counteract the lethargy observed in the entire congregation, made up of people who had talked themselves into being unimaginative, inward-focused, passive islands who had no vision, kept their opinions to themselves, and remained disconnected from each other. If the older congregants were being honest, the incongruity may have a number of reasons:

1. The older congregants may be delusional (i.e. defining “nurturing” as “compliant” or “making a difference” as “being a people-pleaser”),
2. The older congregants may define these traits in ways that are not erroneous but still different from the pastor’s definition. (This may come from a variety



of sources, including differences in generational subculture, education, or theological epistemology),

3. The older congregants may be healthy, but held back by another factor (i.e. age, generational subculture, personality type, depth of maturation in each trait, etc.).

Of the seven who disagreed with at least one of the statements in the pre-program survey, three of them did not appear to have relational problems in their thinking, as seen in their positive responses to statements 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The others struggled with one or two relational attributes that could hinder their connectivity to others in the body. One female, age 31-49, did not feel she was a positive example to others and did not feel she was a good friend; but she was not afraid to share life stories, felt she accomplished tasks with others, and felt she was a viable part of a unified body. One male, age 31-49, did not feel as if he accomplished tasks with others and was not comfortable sharing life stories with others; but he did consider himself a good friend, a good example, and a viable member of a unified body. Two females, though from different age groups, believed they were not viable members of a unified body.

The survey responses of the six participants in the program provided a platform for the counterviewing process. Two adult participants (Bert and Emily) scored lowest on the relational questions in the pre-program survey (Statements 2, 6, 7, 8, 9) but also appeared to be the two most eager for spiritual growth as indicated by the verbosity and intensity of their answers to Question 14 in the pre-program interview. This may indicate that the pre-program survey results reflected more of a desire to change rather than an

unhealthy self-concept. Indeed, Bert and Emily showed the highest percentage of growth in adults regarding their use of positive modifiers. I will discuss more on that later.

**Table 14: Participants' Responses to Survey Questions, By Age (Pre-Program)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Carol	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Emily	D	D	D	D	A	D	A	A	A
Bert	A	A	A	D	D	A	D	A	D
Cherie	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A	A
James	A	A	D	D	D	A	A	A	D
Bobby	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A

After starting the program, I discovered the only statement all participants agreed on was Statement 8: “I am not afraid to share life stories openly with others.” This may explain why these six came forward so readily. In fact, only one person who disagreed with at least one of the pre-program survey statements did not participate in the program; and she was the only one among all twelve congregants who indicated she was uncomfortable sharing life stories openly.

### **Comparisons of the Pre-Program and Post-Program Interviews**

In the 15-question pre-program and post-program interviews, participants were asked three sets of five questions designed to determine each person’s practice, sense of agency, and sense of calling. Hypothetically, a comparison of each of these will give us an idea of the incongruity between what people believe about right relationships in the church, what they believe about their own capability to have right relationships in the church, and what they actually do in church. Modifiers used by each participant were assessed within their context and separated into positive and negative categories. The

results of the pre-program and post-program interviews are shown in Table 15. Based on the number of words in each interview, the percentage of modifiers used by each person in the interviews was assessed. The results are shown in Table 16.

As shown in Table 18, the flux in Cherie's self-perception was marginal, only changing at two points (Questions 2 and 8). Cherie entered the program believing she was an agent of change in every facet of relational need and exited the program questioning her ability to help people overcome negative self-talk. In practice, she entered the program believing she was an integral part of the mission of Faith Church and exited the program unsure of whether she should count nursery work as being a part of mission since her son was the one she took care of in nursery. These are minor shifts and perhaps attributable to the normal flux of thought processes.

**Table 15: Number of Modifiers and Words in Each Interview**

	Positive Modifiers (Pre- Program)	Negative Modifiers (Pre- Program)	Positive Modifiers (Post- Program)	Negative Modifiers (Post- Program)	Number of Words (Preprogram)	Number of Words (Post Program)
Cherie	28	14	26	16	1475	1702
Bert	24	24	102	58	1579	3034
Carol	4	2	7	0	234	198
Emily	23	19	49	19	1261	1231
James	1	2	6	3	83	107
Bobby	4	2	11	8	57	163

**Table 16: Percentage of Modifiers in Each Interview**

	% pos. modifiers pre- program	% neg. modifiers pre- program	% pos. modifiers post- program	% neg. modifiers post- program
Cherie	1.898	0.949	1.527	0.940
Bert	1.519	1.519	3.361	1.911

Carol	1.709	0.854	3.535	0
Emily	1.823	1.506	3.980	1.543
James	1.204	2.409	5.607	2.803
Bobby	7.017	3.508	6.748	4.907

An analysis of Cherie's use of modifiers shows her using more positive modifiers (28) in the pre-program interview than anyone else. Positive modifiers accounted for 1.898% of her words, which is the second highest of all participants and the highest among adults. In addition, she used less negative modifiers (14) in the pre-program interview than anyone in her age group (31-49). Her negative modifiers accounted for only 0.949% of her words in the pre-program interview. In the post-program interview, the difference was marginal (1.527% positive, .940% negative). Though her use of words increased by 15% by the end of the program, the number of modifiers she used stayed the same, leading to a 19.527% decrease in positive modifiers and a 0.956% decrease in negative modifiers.

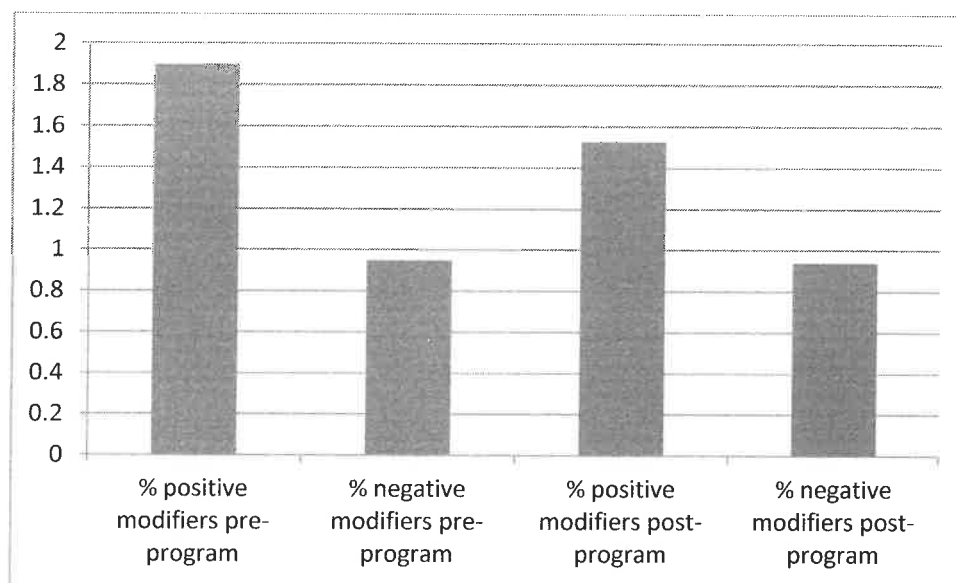
**Table 17: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in Cherie's Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

<b>Cherie</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Cherie</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Practice							
Companionship	1	no	No	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	yes	No	Agent of Mission	7	yes	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	no	no	Agent of Vulnerability	8	yes	yes
Practice Mutuality	4	no	no	Agent of Mutuality	9	yes	yes
Practice Liberation	5	yes	yes	Agent of Liberation	10	yes	no
<b>Cherie</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>				
Called to							
Companionship	11	yes	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to							
Vulnerability	13	no	no				
Called to Mutuality	14	yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	yes	yes				

**Table 18: Flux Matrix for Cherie's Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

Cherie; change was -2/15		
0	0	0
-1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	-1	0

James' flux matrix shows a similar marginal change in his answers as seen in Table 20. James showed only two changes from the beginning to the end of the program. He began the program claiming to be active in mission and to connect with people. He ended the program saying he is involved in the church's mission "very infrequently" and connects with people infrequently. There was no change in his perception of himself as a person who cannot share personal details about his life or in his inactivity as a friend, liberator, and vulnerable person.



**Figure 4: Percentage of Modifiers in Cherie's Interviews (Pre- and Post-program)**

Though his overall responses to the questions showed marginal change, his use of modifiers changed dramatically. James' number of modifiers in the pre-program interview was lower than any other participant (1:2). In fact, his use of positive modifiers accounted for only 1.204% of his words and was the lowest percentage of all. His use of negative modifiers accounted for only 2.409% of his words. By the end of the program, his positive modifiers had jumped to 5.607% – the second highest of all. His negative modifiers made up 2.803% of his words (see Figure 5). This constituted a 365.420% increase in positive and a 16.355% increase of negative. As shown in Figure 5, the change in negative modifiers was marginal; but the change in positive was remarkable.

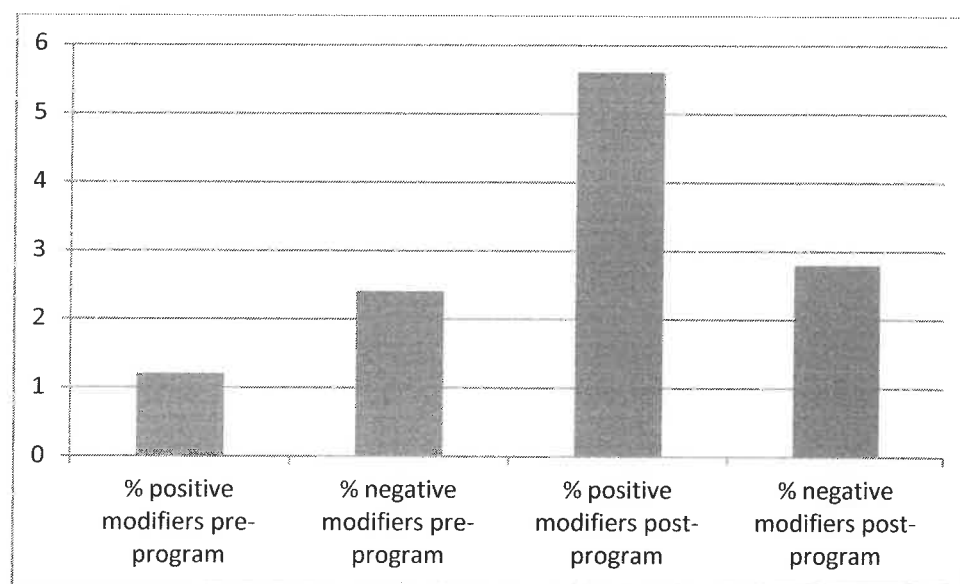
**Table 19: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in James' Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

James	Q	Pre	Post	James	Q	Pre	Post
Practice Companionship	1	no	no	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	yes	no	Agent of Mission	7	yes	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	no	no	Agent of Vulnerability	8	No	No
Practice Mutuality	4	yes	no	Agent of Mutuality	9	Yes	Yes
Practice Liberation	5	no	no	Agent of Liberation	10	Yes	yes
James	Q	Pre	Post				
Called to Companionship	11	yes	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to Vulnerability	13	yes	yes				
Called to Mutuality	14	yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	yes	yes				

**Table 20: Flux Matrix for James' Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

James; change was -2/15		
0	0	0
-1	0	0
0	0	0
-1	0	0
0	0	0

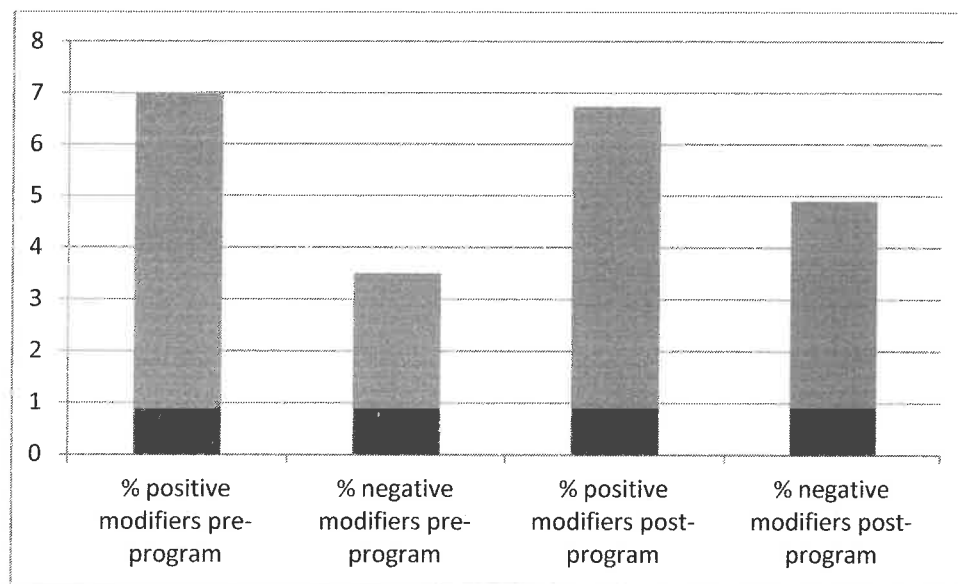
Bobby's use of modifiers was much different from James' in that his change in the percentage of positive modifiers was marginal. Per capita of words used, Bobby was, by far, the most positive of all the participants. His use of positive modifiers in the pre-program interview constituted 7.017% of his words. His use of negative modifiers made up 3.508%. In the post-program interview, he still ranked as the highest (6.748 positive, 4.907 negative). Nevertheless, like Cherie, the amount of change for him was marginal, declining by 3.834% in positive modifiers and increasing 39.877% in negative. The change, shown in Figure 6, is similar to Cherie's, showing very little difference between the pre- and post-program interview responses.



**Figure 5: Percentage of Modifiers in James' Interviews (Pre- and Post-Program)**

Though Bobby's use of modifiers was much like Cherie's, his flux matrix shows positive growth. Bobby changed positively in his sense of responsibility to share personal details about his life, in his development of friendships at the church, and in his practice

of connecting to people. On the negative side, he no longer actively helps people overcome negative self-talk.



**Figure 6: Percentage of Modifiers in Bobby's Interviews (Pre- and Post-Program)**

**Table 13: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in Bobby's Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

<b>Bobby</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Bobby</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Practice Companionship	1	no	yes	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	no	no	Agent of Mission	7	yes	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	no	no	Agent of Vulnerability	8	No	No
Practice Mutuality	4	no	yes	Agent of Mutuality	9	yes	Yes
Practice Liberation	5	yes	no	Agent of Liberation	10	Yes	yes
<b>Bobby</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>				
Called to Companionship	11	yes	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to Vulnerability	13	No	yes				
Called to Mutuality	14	Yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	Yes	yes				



**Table 22: Flux Matrix for Bobby's Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

Bobby; change was 2/15		
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	1
1	0	0
-1	0	0

**Table 14: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in Bert's Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

Bert	Q	Pre	Post	Bert	Q	Pre	Post
Practice Companionship	1	no	no	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	no	yes	Agent of Mission	7	no	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	No	yes	Agent of Vulnerability	8	yes	yes
Practice Mutuality	4	No	yes	Agent of Mutuality	9	no	yes
Practice Liberation	5	yes	yes	Agent of Liberation	10	yes	yes
Bert	Q	Pre	Post				
Called to Companionship	11	no	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to Vulnerability	13	yes	yes				
Called to Mutuality	14	yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	yes	yes				

An analysis of Bert's responses to the questions in the pre- and post-program interviews is shown in Table 23. At the beginning of the program, Bert's only positive response to questions that measured his practical application of relational traits (1-5) was to Question 3, which showed he was invested in helping people overcome negative self-talk. He believed he was capable of sharing about his personal life, but did not do so at the church. Bert also felt capable as a friend, but did not feel called to deepen relationships and did not pursue it in practice. At the conclusion of the program, Bert answered negatively to only one interview question (Question 1). Positive change was

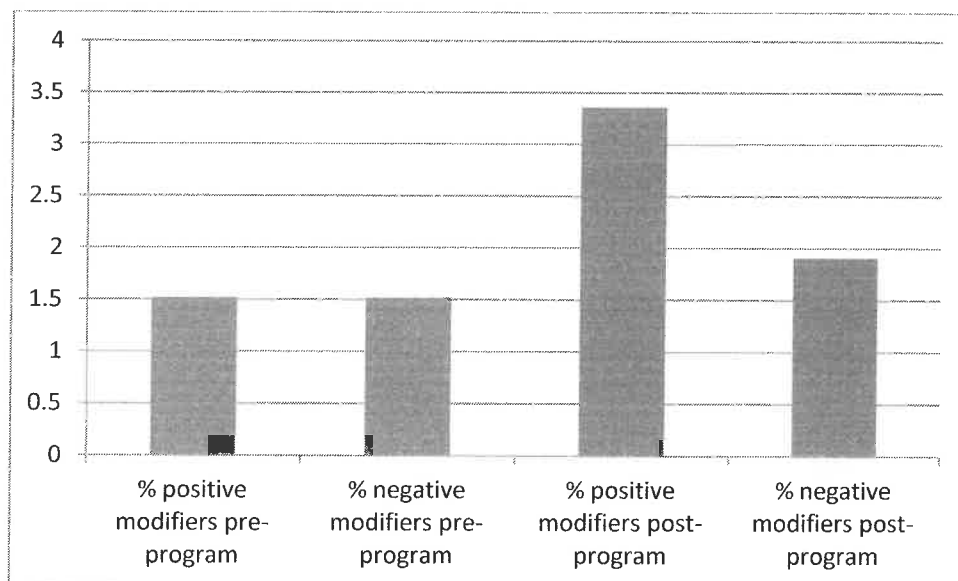
measured in six of the questions, giving him the highest number of positive changes of all participants.

**Table 24: Flux Matrix for Bobby's Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

<b>Bert (change was 6/15)</b>		
0	0	1
1	1	0
1	0	0
1	1	0
0	0	0

Unlike Cherie who used twice as many positive modifiers as negative, Bert used an equal amount of positive and negative modifiers (24 each) in the pre-program interview, accounting for 1.52% of his words spoken. Of adult participants, this was the lowest percentage of positive modifiers. By the end of the program, however, his use of positive modifiers increased by 121% and accounted for 3.361% of his words. As shown in Figure 7, Bert's use of positive modifiers spiked in the post-program interview, much like that of James (See Figure 5).

Carol's results from the pre- and post-program surveys show her self-perception as the highest of all participants. The only negative responses were to the pre-program agent of liberation (8) and post-program practice liberation (3) questions. She started the program questioning her ability to help people overcome negative self-talk, but, in practice, did it anyway. She finished the program believing she could help someone overcome negative self-talk but doubted whether she did it very much. Because she improved in one area and digressed in another, her flux matrix value was 0/15 (Table 26).



**Figure 7: Percentage of Modifiers in Bert's Interviews (Pre- and Post-Program)**

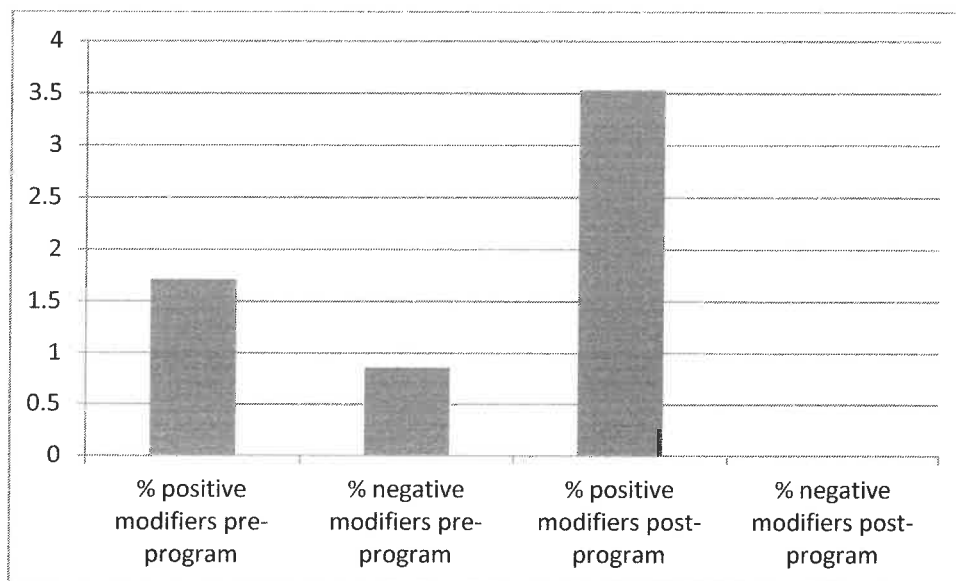
**Table 25: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in Carol's Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

Carol	Q	Pre	Post	Carol	Q	Pre	Post
Practice Companionship	1	yes	yes	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	yes	yes	Agent of Mission	7	yes	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	yes	yes	Agent of Vulnerability	8	yes	yes
Practice Mutuality	4	yes	yes	Agent of Mutuality	9	yes	yes
Practice Liberation	5	yes	no	Agent of Liberation	10	no	yes
Carol	Q	Pre	Post				
Called to Companionship	11	yes	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to Vulnerability	13	yes	yes				
Called to Mutuality	14	yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	yes	yes				

**Table 26: Flux Matrix for Carol's Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

Carol; change was 0/15		
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
-1	1	0

Carol's use of modifiers in the pre-program interview was similar to that of Cherie's. She used twice as many positive modifiers as negative (4:2). Though the number was far below the number of modifiers in the other adults (25:19 mean), the number of words she used to answer each question (234) was also far below that of the other adults (1438 mean). Only 0.854% of her words in the pre-program interview were negative modifiers, ranking her as second lowest in that category. In the post-program interview, her modifiers were emphatically positive (7:0), doubling her use of positive modifiers. She used 15% less words in the post-program interview, but still showed a 106.818% increase of positive modifiers in her conversation. The spike in data for Carol's post-program interview (Figure 8) matches the spike in James' and Bert's bar graph.



**Figure 8: Percentage of Modifiers in Carol's Interviews (Pre- and Post-Program)**

Though an adult, Carol exhibited some of the same characteristics of the child participants. Her low usage of words in the interviews is comparable to the children's average answers (70 pre-program, 135 post-program). The other adults used an average of 1,438 words in the pre-program interviews and 1,989 in the post-program. This difference may be attributed to a combination of her disability and her education. The average number of words used by each person almost perfectly matches their education level as shown in Table 27. Those with a lower amount of education also appeared to know less about their lives indicated by the frequent use of terms such as "I don't know" or "I don't remember."

**Table 2715: Number of Words Used in All Interviews (with Average), by Education**

	Bert	Cherie	Emily	Carol	James	Bobby
	1579	1475	1261	234	83	57
	3034	1702	1231	198	107	163
<b>Average</b>	2306.5	1588.5	1246	216	95	110

Emily's responses in Table 28 showed very little change. The only improvement, if any, was an increased hope in a unified body at Faith Church, as shown in her answer to Question 9. The only negative answer that did not change was to Question 4: "How often do you connect with others at church?". Overall, Emily's practice, agency, and calling appeared to change only marginally during the course of the program, displaying a score of 1/15 (Table 29).

**Table 28: Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility observed in Emily's Pre- and Post-Program Interviews**

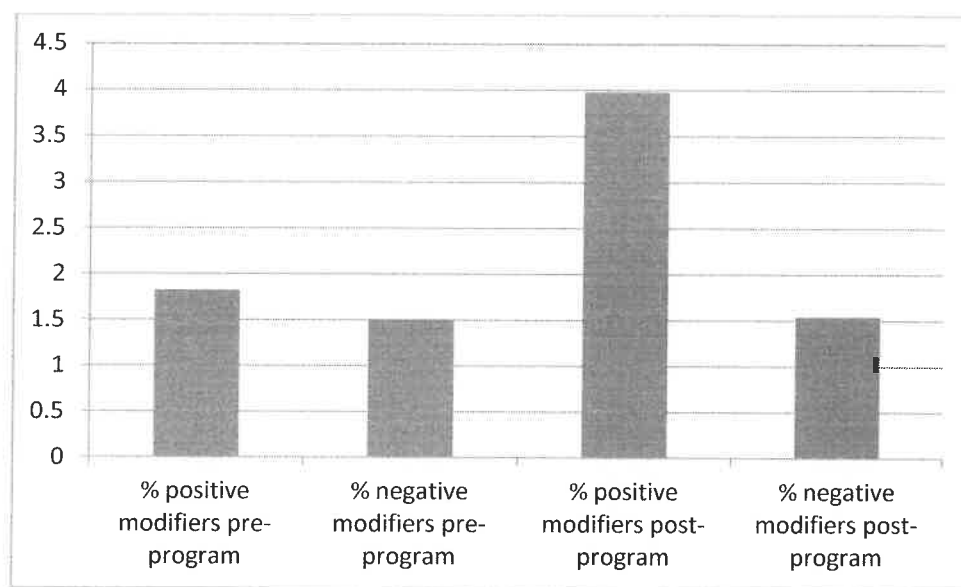
Emily	Q	Pre	Post	Emily	Q	Pre	Post
Practice Companionship	1	yes	yes	Agent of Companionship	6	yes	yes
Practice Missionality	2	yes	yes	Agent of Mission	7	yes	yes
Practice Vulnerability	3	yes	yes	Agent of Vulnerability	8	yes	yes
Practice Mutuality	4	no	no	Agent of Mutuality	9	no	yes
Practice Liberation	5	yes	yes	Agent of Liberation	10	yes	yes
Emily	Q	Pre	Post				
Called to Companionship	11	yes	yes				
Called to Mission	12	yes	yes				
Called to Vulnerability	13	yes	yes				
Called to Mutuality	14	yes	yes				
Called to Liberation	15	yes	yes				

**Table 29: Flux Matrix for Bobby's Practice, Agency, and Calling/Responsibility Data (0 = no change, -1 = yes to no, 1 = no to yes)**

Emily; change was 1/15		
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	1	0
0	0	0

Emily used modifiers in the pre-program interviews much the same way Bert does – almost as many positives and negatives (23:19) – but more than doubles the number of positive modifiers (49) while using the same number of negatives (19) in the post-

program interview. This represents a 118.235% increase in the percentage of positives and only a 2.437% increase in negatives. Like Bert, James, and Carol, Emily's use of negatives did not seem to change much; but her use of positives spiked in the post-program interview.



**Figure 9: Percentage of Modifiers in Emily's Interviews (Pre- and Post-Program)**

The use of modifiers by all participants in the pre-program interview provided a norm for comparison. Most of the participants used a similar percentage of positive and negative modifiers, although Bobby's modifiers were disproportionate to the rest -- perhaps because of his age (11). If we consider Bobby's data as an enigma due to his age and compare the rest of the participants' data, we may determine an average normal use of modifiers as roughly 1.630% positive of the words we speak and 1.447% negative (Table 30).

**Table 30: Worksheet for Determining Baseline Average of Modifiers Spoken, based on modifiers used in pre-program interviews**

Participant	% positive modifiers pre-program	% negative modifiers pre-program
Cherie	1.898	0.949
Bert	1.519	1.519
Carol	1.709	0.854
Emily	1.823	1.506
James	1.204	2.409
Bobby	NA	NA
<b>Average</b>	<b>1.630</b>	<b>1.447</b>

I found that significant change occurred in most people's use of modifiers, regardless of whether those modifiers were positive or negative. Modifiers, as Kamps and Marx suggest, are "prominent candidates" to be "words with attitude or values."<sup>12</sup> This may suggest that an increase of all modifiers in dialogue could mean a heightened attitudinal experience with the interview questions. Though the use of negative modifiers increased in some of the participants' dialogue, the increase was marginal in most compared to the increase in positive modifiers.

As shown in Figures 7 and 8, the two participants who suffer from ASD showed dramatic changes in their use of modifiers -- an enigma that could be explained by the compulsion common to people with ASD to fixate on certain words or phrases<sup>13</sup> and to

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12. Jaap Kamps and Maarten Marx, "Words with Attitude," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Global WordNet*. 332-331, CIIL, (Mysore, India, 2002), 332.

13. Eva Troyb, Kelly Knoch, and Marianne Barton, "Phenomenology of ASD: Definition, Syndromes, and Major Features," in *The Neuropsychology of Autism*, ed. Deborah Fein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 23.

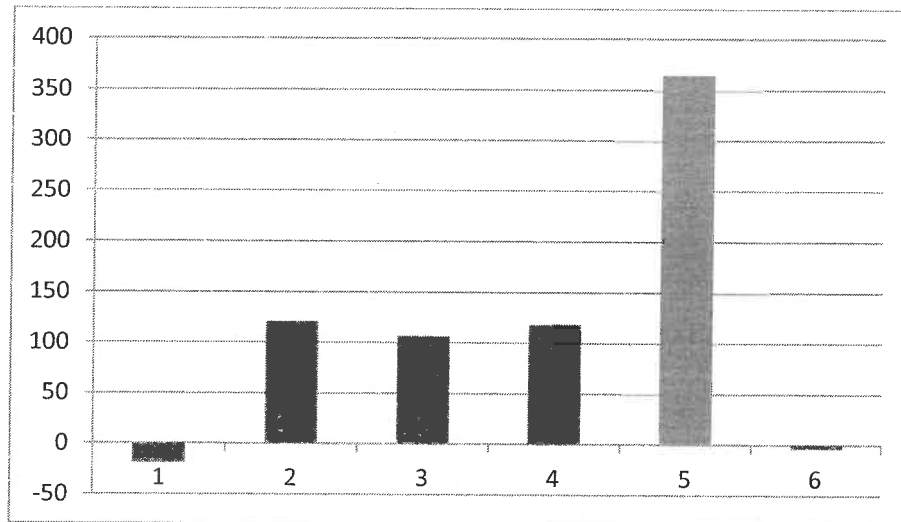


have difficulty refocusing when a trigger garners their attention.<sup>14</sup> If we consider Carol's sudden elimination of negative modifiers and James' sudden increase of positive modifiers (Table 31) as enigmas due to their disorder and create a composite set of data from their two non-triggered results, we present a composite closer to the average than any other participant (Figure 12). Thus we find a 64.5752% average increase of positive modifiers compared to 16.6968% average increase of negative modifiers in participants.

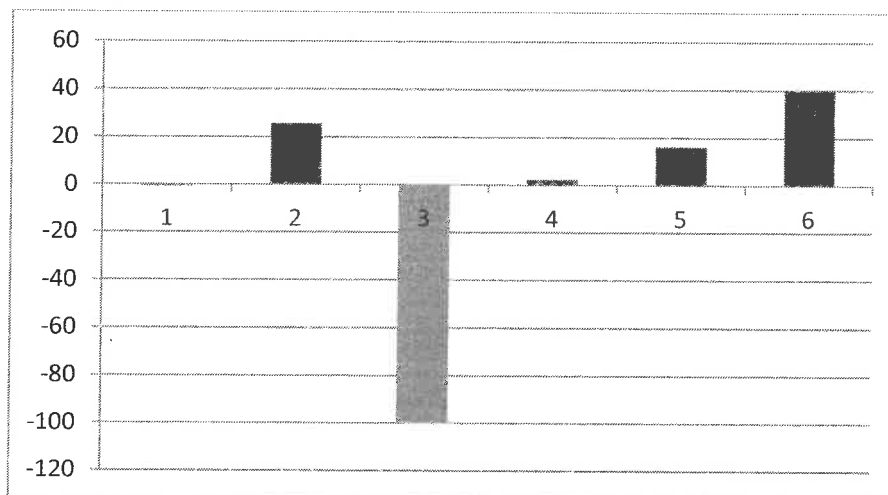
In each interview, participants favored certain questions over others by using more words to voice their opinion about them. Indeed, each participant favored at least two of the same questions, with the exception of Cherie, who only favored one question in both the pre- and post-program interviews (Question 7). James favored Questions 3 and 1 in both the pre- and post-program interviews, which had to do with the practice of liberation and the practice of companionship. Carol favored Questions 2 and 5 (practice of vulnerability and practice of missionality). Bobby favored Questions 8 and 10 (agent of vulnerability and agent of liberation). Emily favored Questions 6 and 4 (agent of companionship and practicing mutuality). Bert favored Questions 13 and 11 (called to liberate and called to companionship).

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14. Brittany G. Travers, Mark R. Klinger, and Laura Grofer Klinger, "Attention and Working Memory in ASD," in *The Neuropsychology of Autism*, ed. Deborah Fein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 164-165.



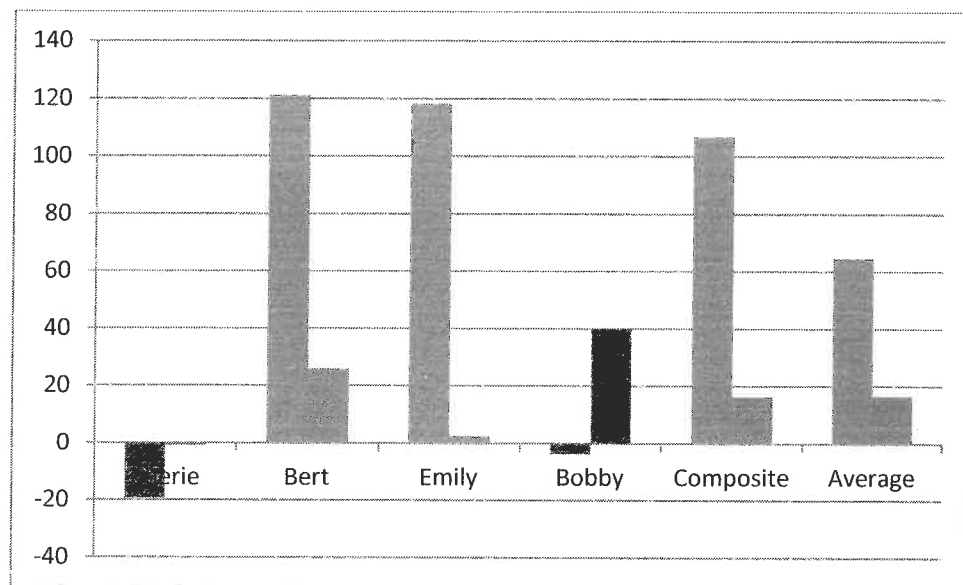
**Figure 10: Percent Increase in Positive Modifiers in All Post-Program Interviews (1 = Cherie, 2 = Bert, 3 = Carol, 4 = Emily, 5 = James, and 6 = Bobby)**



**Figure 11: Percent Increase in Negative Modifiers in All Post-Program Interviews (1 = Cherie, 2 = Bert, 3 = Carol, 4 = Emily, 5 = James, and 6 = Bobby)**

**Table 31: Average Percent Increase of Modifiers in Participants**

Participants	% increase of positive modifiers	% increase of negative modifiers
Cherie	-19.527	-0.956
Bert	121.184	25.771
Carol	106.818	NA
Emily	118.235	2.437
James	NA	16.355
Bobby	-3.834	39.877
<b>Average</b>	<b>64.5752</b>	<b>16.6968</b>



**Figure 12: Percent Increase in Negative and Positive Modifiers with a Composite of Carol and James' Scores and the Scores of Cherie, Bert, Emily, and Bobby (with Average)**

**Table 32: Favored Questions (by individual) in Pre-Program Interview, based on number of words spoken**

Participant	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Cherie	6	7	9	11
James	3	1	4	10
Bert	13	6	9	11
Carol	8	15	2	5
Bobby	8	3	10	4 and 1
Emily	6	4	9	14

**Table 33: Favored Questions (by individual) in Post-Program Interview, based on number of words spoken**

Participant	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Cherie	7	5	12	8
James	3	2	11	1
Bert	12	13	11	15
Carol	5	4	11	2
Bobby	10	8	11	2
Emily	7	6	10	4

## **Analysis of Interviewing/Counterviewing Sessions**

### **Bert: A Case Study**

Bert's paradigm for relationships was one of expected disillusionment. He described himself as a "loner" (Session 1) and a "perfectionist" (Session 6). Prior to participating in the project, Bert had suffered from all the chronic problem stories identified by Madigan: (1) self-surveillance, (2) feelings of illegitimacy, (3) fear, (4) negative imagination/invidious comparison, (5) internalized bickering, (6) hopelessness, (7) perfectionism, and (8) guilt. In fact, his wife claimed he had contemplated suicide earlier in life and that he seemed to never be content with where he was spiritually or socially. Bert said his thoughts were like "voices...whispering and bombarding you, it's pushing you down rather than building you up." (Session 2). He said he had so many ideas floating around in his head that he found it difficult to discern which were good and which were bad.

His story showed that he had been involved in several forms of ministry in several different denominations, including Episcopal, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic. He said he never felt completely home in any of them, because none of them offered everything he needed to grow adequately in Christ. He said he always wanted "more" (Session 1). He had earned a degree in a religious field and had spent some time as a minister in training at one church and as a worship leader at two others. He was let go from one church because he was not meeting expectations that were not fully expressed to him. He resigned from another after a frustrating experience with administrative decisions. He worked in children's ministry at Faith Church; but talked himself out of it because he was unsure of his role in the body. Though he was no longer

involved in ministry, he tried to keep himself spiritually alert by continually reading self-help books. According to his wife, he could read twenty books at a time. In fact, he had so many books piled up on his bedside table one night that they could not see the clock.

After attending Faith Church for more than six years, he had left the church in 2013 because of his desire to find more of what they were not offering. Some of the reasons cited by him were (1) the lack of deep friendships, (2) the lack of casual conversation, (3) the lack of adequate children's programs, (4) the lack of supernatural signs, and (5) the long drive from his home to the church. In addition, he had complained to me that my sermons were fine but did not give him practical instruction about how to implement what was being taught. After trying several other churches, though, he was plagued with the same problem: He could not be content anywhere. With the development of my narrative therapy program and his exhaustion from church shopping, he returned to Faith Church with the hope that he could find a different solution.

During the six weekly sessions, Bert complained often about "struggling" or "wrestling" with his thoughts. He did not know how to be content in his job, in his relationship with the Lord, or in Faith Church. He considered changing jobs many times; but he said he talked himself out of it each time because he did not think he was qualified for the jobs he was interested in – even jobs that he knew he was qualified for. He considered being ordained; but he talked himself out of it, because he did not know if that was God's leading or whether or not he was capable of being a pastor. He wanted to belong to a church where he could enjoy close fellowship with other believers; but he talked himself out of building those kinds of friendships because of his negative imagination. In his relationship with the Lord, he talked himself into thinking God has a

plan but is not telling him, almost in a cold way, so Bert is continually second-guessing “what I’m meant to be doing.” He said, “I’m praying [but] I don’t really feel I’m getting a yes or a no answer.” (Session 2). He continually complained of a feeling of alienation from God and from other Christians.

Bert traced his perfectionism to his father, who was as a hard-working perfectionist himself. One of his most memorable events with his father, Bert recalled, was when he was told to build a wall without proper instruction. When Bert was finished with the wall, his father humiliated him by complaining that he had not done it properly and then tore it down. Bert grieved over his father’s displeasure and disconnection from him, noting that it was unfair of him to expect him to do it correctly without investing adequate time training him.

This story appeared to be central to his problem story of pessimism as well. I suggested that Bert may have transferred that image to his relationships with God, his churches, his pastor, and many others through the years. This would explain why he has been so prone to talk himself out of connecting with others in the body of Christ and short-circuiting his career in ministry on so many occasions.

Perhaps, though, his mindset as a victim of unreasonable expectations and poor modeling came from a previous event, leading him to project that attribute (perhaps unfairly) onto his father long before the wall incident. Bert remembered a time as a five year old when he was being taught English, the teachers introduced a new form of English called ITA, which they implemented for a year and then abandoned. He said, “My feeling of incompetence with math and English was an early stage of my development...I think it did hinder me a lot. And I was actually born premature, and so

developmentally I think I was behind as well” (Session 6) It is possible Bert learned to think like a victim as early as age five.

Before his six weeks were completed, Bert began to show improvement in his self-perception and in his connectedness to others in the church. I told Bert to return to ministry only when he felt comfortable doing so – and only on the condition that he saw me as a support and resource. He showed initiative by developing and implementing a children’s church program. He was also asked by the men’s Sunday school teacher to serve as a substitute for him when he was away. He joined the worship team as a vocalist and instrumentalist. He claimed to have seen a measurable change in his thoughts since beginning the program, observing in his journal “The only limitations are the limitations you place upon yourself. Or the only limitations you place upon yourself are the lies you believe and place upon yourself.” (Session 5).

After the six weeks were completed, Bert took a two week vacation with his wife and children. He took part in a KidMin Conference in which he regained his passion and outside-of-the-box strategies for children’s ministry. He also attended a worship seminar led by Hillsong instructors and committed himself to “stretching himself”<sup>15</sup> as a guitarist. In October, 2014, he vowed to “fast from self-help books,”<sup>16</sup> which he had identified as an addiction for him, and to devote himself to finding God in the simplicity of solitude and sabbatical.

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15. Bert, interview by author, October 11, 2014.

16. Ibid.

### Carol: A Case Study

Carol's paradigm for relationships is one of expected abandonment. Carol is an unemployed, unmarried woman in her sixties with physical, emotional, and mental impairments (ASD). She has half a dozen household pets and no relatives except an older brother whom she met once. As a child, she was spent some time in an orphanage and was later admitted to a mental institution where she was prescribed thorazine (commonly used to treat schizophrenia) and haldol (prescribed for autism). Throughout her life, before and after being institutionalized, she had encountered several traumatic events, which left her deeply wounded and skeptical of others. However, because of her disabilities, she relies heavily on others for transportation, banking, and other basic needs. As an adult, she was in the habit of thinking the worst about life and gossiping about many of the significant people who assisted her. Her landlord, maintenance workers, health care workers, social workers, and many of her church acquaintances reportedly gave up on her. Her primary response to people who let her down was to give up on them.

Her relational problems were intensified by a short attention span and a tendency to believe most of what she perceived of what she read and heard. Unfortunately, her failure to adequately discern the difference between figures of speech and plain speech or the difference between likelihood and possibility impaired her perception of reality. When a friend made an off-the-cuff remark about her cell phone being "burning hot," she became convinced her apartment was going to burn down and insisted her landlord rewire the entire apartment. When he refused to rewire the apartment, she found it



difficult to sleep at night, because she feared she was going to die in her bed. She became hostile, acting out and slandering him to her neighbors and friends.

Carol had been attending Faith Church for one year before beginning her six weekly sessions. She was involved in the nursery and played the piano for the offering every Sunday. She had established relationships with four of the women in the church and called each of them between four and ten times per day to ask questions about decisions she had to make, give updates on the results of her decisions, and ask for assistance. Her relationships with others seemed to be one-sided and were directed primarily by her problems and interests. She found it difficult to concentrate on other people's words. In fact, when someone spoke to her about a topic that was of interest to him or her, Carol's usual response was to change the subject abruptly to one of her own interests. In addition, she did not use common transitional phrases when changing subjects (i.e. "That reminds me of..." or "Speaking of..."). She did not read social cues (i.e. facial expressions or implied remarks) and so was often oblivious to the needs and thoughts of others. Her failure to identify or comply with social mores within conversations was, to outsiders, an appalling lack of empathy or tact, which made it difficult for her acquaintances to deepen friendships with her.

During the six-week program, she found it difficult to remember names, dates, and details about her life story -- especially those details that involved other people. Her problem story was wrapped around a lifestyle of abandonment. Her parents, adopted father, institution administrators, church members, and friends had all allegedly deserted her. In fact, her current relationship with her landlord was becoming volatile because, she claimed, he "always lied" and "never did anything" for her. I served as a mediator

between Carol and her landlord, who was on the verge of evicting her because of her refusal to comply with several of his requests and the slander she was spreading to other tenants and the general public. She became hostile toward me as well, because she said I was taking her landlord's side. I pointed out to her that the inner dialogue that consumed her -- that all relationships will inevitably abandon her -- had probably tainted her thinking about her landlord and about me. I assured her that I cared for her and wanted what was best for her. I also gave examples of how her landlord and I also cared for her and did things that were far beyond the call of duty. I gave instructions about building the right kind of relationship with her landlord and called an electrician to answer questions about the wiring problems she was concerned about. Carol eventually calmed down and complied with all of her landlord's requests. She was pleasantly surprised to see her landlord repairing items in her apartment and volunteering to take her on errands -- which he did on several occasions.

After the six weekly sessions, Carol paid closer attention to her words. With the help of the other women in the church, she put more effort into breaking the gossip habit. In fact, she found that gossip was not a good foundation for developing friendships -- as she had thought previously. She also began to grasp the importance of not jumping to conclusions and judging people too quickly. With the sudden death of half of her pets in a two-week timeframe, I and many others from the church assisted her with burials and finding solutions to the problems that killed them. Uncharacteristically, she displayed a normal set of emotions through the grieving process and did not revert back to her former paradigm of expected abandonment. She found comfort in the assurance that God had not abandoned her and that we did not either.

### Cherie: A Case Study

Cherie agreed to be a participant in the program for many reasons. She enjoyed the idea of having a break from her children once a week and just to have another adult sit down with her and listen to her for an hour. She wanted to show support for her pastor's research, because she had a strong sense of duty to people in leadership roles and for those in ministry. She also desired to know more about her husband, who was struggling with unhealthy self-talk and was also taking part in the program. She did not seem to suspect that she would need therapy, based on the first telling of her life story.

During the six-week program, Cherie shared how she received Christ as her Lord and Savior as a young girl and grew up in a vibrant church where she took leadership roles as a teenager and grew in the Lord. Her parents were good, supportive, outstanding Christians and leaders in the community. Cherie never struggled with unhealthy self-talk and was confident that the Lord was always with her and that she was a valuable member of Christ's body. In fact, she followed in her parents' footsteps and became a leader in the community in a field that endears her to thousands of children each year.

Cherie's main concern was her husband's problem story, which included chronic depression and former thoughts of suicide. Her husband (Bert) did not seem to open up to her very often about the thoughts he was wrestling with – or, when he did, it was an inopportune time. She wanted to know what to do with “his downer attitude” (Session 5). As a person who had struggled with unhealthy self-talk, I was able to give her some ideas about what my wife had done for me, including listening more actively, increasing physical intimacy, and replacing the delusions in his self-image mosaic with truth as

often as she recognized a chronic problem story arise. I told her that his self-image mosaic had taken a long time to construct; and it would take a long time to repair.

As Cherie's dialogue with her husband opened up, it became clear that he may have been harboring some resentment toward her because of her alleged lack of deep introspection. I assured her that his response was normal for someone who struggles with depression and that there is nothing wrong with her – that her personality type had traits that were equally valuable and that she did not have to be her husband to make her relationship with him work.

As the weeks progressed, Cherie became more candid about her feelings of inadequacy as a mother, as a support for her struggling husband, and as a conversationalist in social settings. She said at church, she did “a lot of smiling and nodding and pretending to be friendly”<sup>17</sup> because, she observed, Sunday is generally geared toward polite conversation and “mingling.”<sup>18</sup> She confessed that her family was never very touchy-feely. She felt she was not a nurturer – her only negative statement on the pre-program survey – because she didn't know how to, in her words, “ask pertinent questions to help them grow in their faith and to help know them and to encourage them in what they're doing.”

After counterviewing her statement about not being a nurturer, she admitted that she did care about people, but conversation had always been “somewhat difficult” because of her personality type (Session 3). She suggested the development of home fellowship groups would help her because it would give her a platform for opening up

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17. Cherie, interview by author, Session 3.

18. Cherie, interview by author, Session 4.

and sharing. She said she was working toward developing her hospitality skills and hoped to someday offer such a ministry at her home.

A few months after completing the program, Cherie took part in Faith Church's dinner theatre and took the initiative to organize the wait staff and serve as the *maitre de* for the event. She also volunteered to help the pastor's wife as she prepared for Sunday morning services.

### Emily: A Case Study

Emily was one of the two people who scored lowest on the pre-program survey, disagreeing with four out of the nine statements about her self-identity. Her initial story sounded positive, though. She received Christ as a young girl and was the daughter of two good, outstanding members in the community and leaders in the church. She enjoyed helping her father when he worked on cars and spent much quality time with her mother and older sister. She learned to do chores at home without questioning her parents and to avoid sinful activities that were common vices in teenagers. She was happily married for more than 25 years to a good man, whom she had met in youth group as a teenager. Her children followed the Lord. She was currently a stay-at-home mom. She was involved as a leader in church ministry.

As the six weekly sessions progressed, though, it became clear that Emily was restless inside. She said leadership in church ministry was difficult for her, because she did not feel adequate for the task. She did not see herself as a creative person, a positive example to others, an influencer outside her closest relationships, a nurturer, or a good friend. In addition, she lamented about not feeling as close to her children as she "should

have been.” When asked what a good mom was, she said it was a person who helps children learn chores, keeps the house clean, and has a relationship with her children blessed by continual openness. “A good mom has better communication with her kids. I don’t see my daughter coming to me much,” she said.<sup>19</sup> (*Yet in a separate interview, her son called her “awesome,” because “she’s always there [for me].”*<sup>20</sup>)

She blamed financial troubles for her alleged disconnection from her children. She did not want to shirk her responsibility; but she did not want to assume all guilt either. Life demanded that she work to make ends meet, leaving her children to be cared for by others. Her husband and daycare workers were many good things; but they were not a mom – they were not her. She claimed that she had been forced to live that way for so long that she did not know where to start to fix what was broken – specifically, teaching her children good work habits. She said she fights an uphill battle trying to get them to do their chores and routinely gives up and does them herself. She had been so permissive in her relationships that she rarely made an effort to get what she wanted or deserved. In fact, she had lived this way for so long that she did not have any hobbies or interests that she could say she was passionate about.

I asked Emily if there was anything in her past that may have contributed to her being a passenger in her own life, just allowing life to happen to her. She said that, as a pre-teen, her family had become involved in a home fellowship group that had morphed into a church – and later into a cult. Emily and her family had adopted a communal spirit and developed deep friendships with many members. They also learned to enjoy a simple

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19. Emily, interview by author, Session 2.

20. Bobby, interview by author, Session 3.

life and to make their own household products. Women in the fellowship were expected to submit to the men and to allow them to make all the important decisions. Their involvement in the group cost them dearly. Emily's father, who was once a pastor and schoolteacher, quit his careers in public service and opened a woodworking business that barely paid the bills. Emily's parents donated many of their household goods so the church could buy farmland and build a commune. Because of their low income, Emily was not able to take music or dance lessons as she dreamed. Without warning, the cult members suddenly uprooted all of those who were on a special list of "the chosen" and absconded to secret destinations across the country – even deserting the commune they had just built. Emily's family was left behind. She was thirteen.

The greatest tragedy during her family's involvement in the cult was that Emily was repeatedly molested by one of the members of the church when she was about eleven years old. The man, who was in his twenties, had taken advantage of his friendship with the family to get alone time with her and appeared to be grooming her for escalating sexual advances. Fortunately, her parents were alerted to his fixation and put an end to it before he could act out his most depraved fantasies. The man was kicked out of the church. Nevertheless, Emily's frame of mind was changed forever. Over the next few years, she fantasized about being taken advantage of and secretly envied girls who were so treated. In her relationships with boyfriends, she allowed things to happen rather than taking charge of the outcome. Whether it was her boyfriend or her hormones who took the lead, she was just a passive bystander.

Meanwhile, Emily's relationship with her little sister was volatile. Emily bullied her sister throughout her childhood. On several occasions, she said, she held impromptu

“baptisms” in swimming pools and bathtubs in which her sister was forced underwater against her will. Emily continually teased her, picked on, tackled, and beat her. When asked why she did it, Emily said, “I really don’t know why; maybe just because she was younger and could be dominated at that time.”<sup>21</sup> It had never occurred to her that she had been acting out aggression on her sister because of her frustration of being molested as a child. Briere and Elliott noted that victims of child sexual abuse commonly externalize feelings of anger by displaying “chronic irritability” and “the perpetration of abuse against others.”<sup>22</sup>

During the six-week program, it became clear that Emily was frustrated by her own passivity. By her admission, it led to a lazy devotional life, lazy thought life, and lazy social life. She placed no expectations on relationships, which translated to no accountability or reciprocation. That applied to her relationship with God as well as her relationship with her children, husband, and church members. She had always thought that relationships would just happen; all she had to do was to go along for the ride. However, she found that not many people wanted to drive the relationship and connections were easily lost. The outcome was that she did not feel deeply connected to many people.

Though her husband prodded her to draw closer to God through the years, Emily did not begin to do so until her husband left the ministry about sixteen years ago and fell into a deep, seven-year depression. At that time, she had to be the spiritually strong one in the home. She actively pursued her husband and led him back to right thinking.

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21. Emily, interview by author, Session 2.

22. John N. Briere and Diana M. Elliott, “Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Sexual Abuse of Children: The Future of Children* 4, no. 2 (Summer/Fall, 1994): 58.



Around ten years later, she began to show significant initiative after her pastor taught that deep relationships with the Lord were not caught like a cold but caught like something one pursues. She established a daily devotional time and began to seek God through fasting and prayer. Prior to all of this, her walk with God was defined by what she did not do – smoking, drinking, partying. Now, it was defined by who she was in Christ.

Though she has shown improvement over the years, she continues to wrestle with feelings of inadequacy. She struggles with anger and chronic irritability. She suffers from what she calls a “poor memory,” which may be more like selective memory that retains only the memories that support her problem story. However, she is in a good spot; she has the tools she needs to restory her relational mosaic and take over as the driver in her life.

#### James: A Case Study

James is a teenager who comes from a relatively functional family made up of both of his birth parents and three siblings. His parents have a long-standing relationship that has grown closer over the years. His father, an educator and public service worker, works outside the home but has a home office. His mother, a former nursing and accounting student, is a stay-at-home mom who homeschools. Sometimes his father helps educate James by teaching lessons in history, art, music, or Bible. His relationship with his parents is good. His relationship with his siblings is relatively normal. Sometimes he argues with his brother; sometimes he plays with him; and sometimes he talks with him at bedtime until late at night. James is a carefree child who enjoys watching TV and playing computer games.

The decision to homeschool James was made because of bullying at the public school. James suffers from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which makes it difficult for him to relate to children his own age at an age-appropriate level. He has trouble understanding social cues – especially when his peers try to hint at their displeasure with some of his behavior. When he does understand his peers’ social cues, James often does not respond appropriately because he has a tough time empathizing with them. In addition, he toe-walks, which gives his disgruntled peers a platform for bullying. He was routinely ostracized, mocked, and called “ballerina” in the first semester of the sixth grade. Though the school pledged to put an end to the bullying, it continued for several months. James’ attitude toward others changed for the worse. When his parents discovered a short story penned by James about bullies at school disappearing one day, they finally decided to homeschool him. James was happy to comply.

This was not James’s first encounter with bullying. According to his parents, in the past six years, he had been subject to the cruelty of children in two other school systems. In the classroom, his former elementary school teachers reduced bullying by creating a buddy system in which groups of children volunteered to be James’s protector and friend. However, in places where children were unsupervised such as the playground, the cafeteria, and the bus, James was an easy target. When he came around, children would run away from him because “they just didn’t want to be near me,” he said.<sup>23</sup> When they did so, it made him feel he was “not even there.”<sup>24</sup> He was kicked off the bus and removed from the cafeteria and playground several times a year because of altercations of

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23. James, interview by author, Session 2.

24. Ibid.

which he was at the center. When asked by the principles to explain himself, he remained silent because of a developmental delay (DD) that made him unable to form his thoughts into words. This enraged many of the adult aides and bus drivers to the extent that James was sometimes humiliated publicly. His parents said they had to explain the nuances of DD and ASD to a half dozen adults each year, because James often had new teachers, new bus drivers, and new school aides. With no way to prevent bullying in his new school and eager to curb a growing contempt for life they began to see in him, his parents saw no better solution than to homeschool.

Except for his family and five other children who see him once or twice a week, James has no regular acquaintances. All five of the children James knows are younger than him by between two and nine years. This arrangement seems to work for him, though, since his emotional maturity level and array of interests are similar to theirs. They seem to enjoy playing with James; and he relates well with them. Indeed, he seems to have a way with very young children, showing a nurturing side of him not seen in any of his other relationships.

During the six-week program, James described himself as “weird.”<sup>25</sup> When asked what he meant by that, he said that he does “stupid stuff”<sup>26</sup> like funny faces. He displayed a few funny faces for me, some of which were more disturbing than funny. He said that the thing people need to know about him is that he likes to make people laugh. His love of humor was obvious from his many silly comments throughout the interview. He used puns and camp style humor often. (Camp style humor is somewhat of an escapist humor

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25. James, interview by author, Session 2.

26. Ibid.

that often utilizes cheesy irony and surprise anti-aesthetic characters such as those seen in *Monty Python* and *Get Smart*.) Atypical of children with ASD, he displays a good sense of comic timing, a good handling of idioms he knows, and sometimes the adequate formulation of a punch line; however some of his attempts at humor go beyond camp into a world that is completely outside the realm of comedy – so random that it does not make sense. He also tends to interrupt other people’s conversations for the sake of the joke, disregarding whether it is appropriate in the situation. Indeed, he seems to use humor as a defense mechanism, changing the subject to comedy routines when things get too heavy. In the interviews, he quoted lines from Youtube comedy videos such as *Neature Walk*, Julian Smith, and *ASDF*. He says he got his sense of humor from his father, whom I have observed also uses humor as a defense mechanism.

James’s feeling about having ASD was initially positive. He believes autism makes him “smarter.”<sup>27</sup> James is eager to understand what people mean by idioms and insinuations, seeking out answers as often as they come up. However, he was aware of how inflexible he was because of his disorder, “I don’t make good relationships, because I’m always sticking to one task and not doing anything else until it’s over.”<sup>28</sup> Seeing how easily James’s attention flip-flopped during our conversation, though, I questioned whether he really was that way – or if that was something he was told ASD children do.

James also expressed frustration that people expected him to understand implied instruction rather than giving him explicit directives. Fresh from an argument with his brother while they were playing a video game together, he contextualized the topic of

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27. James, interview by author, Session 2.

28. James, interview by author, Session 3.

implicit vs. explicit instruction: “They’re just showing me what they’re doing and not what I have to do,” he said.<sup>29</sup> This, too, may have more to do with his age and maturity level rather than ASD.

As the interviews progressed, it appeared that James showed signs of additional issues that effected his relationship with others. He had difficulty knowing and expressing a collective, general thought about his feelings of life and people. He seemed to only focus on what he was feeling today, right now. When he said he like his mom because she gives him an ice pop for dessert,<sup>30</sup> it was clear that she had given him an ice pop for dessert that evening. Indeed, his short term memory provided him with much of his interactive words with others. His interview and counterview sessions were filled with random thoughts pulled out of his recent discoveries and TV shows. He said, “I have too many thoughts in my head... There’s so many, I can’t even think of them all. And I can’t say them.”<sup>31</sup> When asked to name one of the thoughts rolling around in his head, he popped out with “Smetana.”<sup>32</sup> (He had learned about the composer Smetana that day.) When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he said, “a doctor,” because he had just learned that doctors are highly paid professionals.<sup>33</sup> Yet when asked why he wanted to be a doctor, he did not say that he was interested in the medical field or helping people.

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29. James, interview by author, Session 3.

30. Ibid.

31. James, interview by author, Session 4.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

At another time when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he said “a father,”<sup>34</sup> because he happened to see his father at that moment.

I told James that some may consider these responses typical of ASD children, while others may see them as typical of ADHD children, and still others see them typical of teenage boys who spent too much time playing video games and watching Youtube. I said that James should not feel obliged to do what a “typical” ASD, ADHD, or teenage boy does. Instead, he should define what typical was for himself – or better yet, allow God to define what was typical. There is much more that is normal about him than not. In fact, I pointed out to him that it was normal that he enjoyed hanging out with his friends more than his family, that he got fixated on video games, and that he was nervous about public speaking. He added that he also does what normal Christians do – participate in the worship and listen to the sermon on Sunday morning. I told James that he is dispelling the myths people have about autism.

James was diagnosed with epilepsy at the age of two. By the time he was three years old, he was so medicated that he could barely stand up; yet he still had seizures every day. Doctors claimed that some children had childhood epilepsy, which they typically grow out of after a few years; but James’s case was different. James would never be seizure free, they said. However, a local pastor prayed over him; and the seizures stopped. He has been seizure free for nearly ten years. I asked James if he thought God had a plan for his life. He said, “Yeah.”<sup>35</sup> As a means of staying on the

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34. James, interview by author, Session 4.

35. James, interview by author, Session 5.

subject, his attention then went directly to the corrective surgery he had on his feet. “I got new casts!”<sup>36</sup>

Though James claimed that his relationship with his father was good, he complained that his father did not spend as much time with him as he wanted him to. He said he felt like “the kids on *Supernanny* -- every episode when the dad just always disappeared into his room.”<sup>37</sup> He cited three different projects he and his father had started together but never finished. When counterviewed, James admitted that his father often worked at home and, as a result, had to go into his room and close the door. They were also under great financial stress and could not afford to finish some of the projects they started. I asked James if he thought his dad would finish any of the projects if he just asked him to. James said that there was a “seventy-five percent” chance that he would, but a 25% chance that he wouldn’t because he was too busy. Then he quickly added, “Hey, he should be a doctor instead. Once he gets a job as a doctor, he can.”<sup>38</sup> For James, there was always a way to brighten the conversation.

### Bobby: A Case Study

Bobby is a preteen boy and the youngest in a family of six. His family is close and each member is devoted to God at some level. His parents have relocated many times because of financial trouble and career moves. In fact, Bobby has lived in seven homes or apartments in the past ten years. Because his state of origin assigns grade levels at a

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36. James, interview by author, Session 5.

37. James, interview by author, Session 3.

38. Ibid.

young age, he is a year younger than the other children in his grade, making him noticeably smaller than most of his peers. In addition, Bobby suffers from childhood shortcomings that most people outgrow by the age of eight, including bedwetting, rhotacism (difficulty pronouncing the letter *r*), and fear of the dark. In the evening and through the night, he is immobilized by fears, being incapable of going into his own bedroom alone or to the bathroom. His fear so petrifies him that he often gets into trouble because of not going to bed on time. He recalls a traumatic Trick or Treating event five years ago in which a screaming man in a clown costume chased him with a chainsaw. Since then, he has suffered from night terrors. However, his parents say Bobby was afraid of the dark even before the clown incident.

In the six-week program, I asked Bobby what he was afraid of that kept him from going to bed on time. Initially, he said he did not know; but eventually, he spoke of serial killers and terrorists. He said his parents watch crime dramas at night; and sometimes he joins them for the prime time shows (*NCIS* and *Unforgettable*). He is not allowed to watch more graphic shows with them; but he catches glimpses of them as he gets ready for bed. Just hearing the music is enough to stir anxiety in him. I asked him if he worries about some kind of violent crime happening to him. He said yes. He worries that “those people are going to be there [in the bedroom].”<sup>39</sup>

I asked Bobby if he did anything to combat his fears. He said he tries to convince himself that it is very unlikely he will ever encounter a criminal in his bedroom; but it

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39. Bobby, interview by author, Session 4.



does not help very much. He considered prayer to be a possible solution. "If we prayed before we went in," he said.<sup>40</sup>

Bobby and his older brother share the same bedroom and play the Wii together. He said they have a good relationship but sometimes get into arguments about "all kinds of stuff."<sup>41</sup> The most recent argument had to do with a Wii game in which his brother did not respond to Bobby's request to join his game. He said he asked him several times but got no response. He felt ignored, even though he knew it could have been a matter of not being heard. I asked Bobby if there was a reason for his brother to not hear him. He said, "Well, he was so into the game..."<sup>42</sup> Bobby says he wants to have a better relationship with his brother and enjoys playing with him.

Before the end of the program, Bobby already showed signs of improvement. He experienced some degree of freedom from his fears. He began to go to bed by himself and stay in his room alone for half an hour before his brother joined him. Upon my request, his parents deliberately keep him away from the television when they watch crime shows. He also reportedly had a sleepwalking incident that showed he may have been transitioning out of night terrors. In addition, he began taking drum lessons and joined the worship team at the church on occasion.

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40. Bobby, interview by author, Session 4.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.



Of those who participated in the program, each one changed in some way.

However, some changes were marginal, fluctuating in only one statement (Carol, Cherie, and Bobby). These may represent a normal flux in people's self-perception over time.

James fluctuated in two statements, becoming less convinced he accomplished mission with others (Statement 7) but more convinced he was a viable part of a unified body (Statement 9). His change is represented on the flux matrix (Table 35) as zero and may also fall into the category of normal flux. Bert and Emily, however, showed the most change. Though Bert finished the program unsure whether he was a good example (Statement 2), he was more sure that he accomplished mission with others (Statement 7) and that he was a viable part of a unified body (Statement 9). His flux score is 1.5.

Emily's change was positive in four statements, giving her the highest flux score of 7.

**Table 16: Flux Matrix of the Pre- and Post-Program Survey showing change by person (0 = no change, -1 = agree to disagree, 1 = disagree to agree, 1.5 = second positive change, 2 = third positive change, 2.5 = fourth positive change).**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Change by Person
Carol	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	-1
Emily	0	1	1.5	2	0	2.5	0	0	0	7
Bert	0	-1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1.5	1.5
Cherie	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
James	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	1	0
Bobby	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

### Discussion: The Participants

Cherie was the only one who exited the program showing no signs of significant change. Her surveys, stories, and interviews were relatively normal. She is a happy person who spoke of 1) a happy childhood with no trauma and 2) struggles that happy

people struggle with. There was no wrestling match with who she was or with her value to God and the church. She knew God was near. Her biggest struggle appeared to be seeing the value in others, evidenced by her difficulty in remembering people's names and personal information -- a struggle every normal person deals with. The marginal flux in her agreement/disagreement with statements, use of modifiers, and answers to questions serve as a point of reference for a normal, organic flux in attitudes and relationships. Bobby and James, who also spoke of happy childhoods with some encounters with trauma, also provide a point of reference, matching Cherie's data in many ways. People may experience disappointments in life and find it difficult to think of others first; but the support of a community of concern (i.e. pastors, godly family members, and churches) minimize the effects by providing companionship, shared mission, liberation from restraints, mutuality, and freedom to be oneself.

Cherie did show some change in her post-program survey, indicating she now saw herself as a nurturing person. Since this was the only statement she had disagreed with in the pre-program survey, it was impossible for her to show more than a flux score of 1. This actually makes it unreasonable to say her growth was marginal – except as her growth compares to others. In her life, the change may well have been critical. There is no way to measure this potential change unless a longitudinal study is performed over a longer period of time.

Carol's and James' disabilities (ASD) may have accounted for their extremes in self-perception as exhibited by their answers to the pre-survey questions and to the interview questions. Carol's self-perception noted in the pre-program survey was the highest of all participants, while James' self-perception in the post-program survey was

the lowest of all. People with autism often struggle to understand other people's social cues and to comprehend appropriate involvement in social situations.<sup>43</sup> This may explain why Carol thinks calling the same three or four women several times per day to tell them about her daily personal crises is the same as building friendships and connecting. She said that friends "do things together" such as Bible study and eating.<sup>44</sup> James said that friends "stick together."<sup>45</sup> Both of them used the word "together" – a concrete word that everyone can understand. Both Carol and James favored questions in the interviews that focused on practice (Carol, Questions 2 and 5, and James Questions 3 and 1), which were concrete questions that did not require deep introspection – as would be needed in the agency questions (Questions 6-10). Barber notes that Christians with autism find it easier to connect with God and with others when there is a concrete form to assist in the conceptualization.<sup>46</sup>

Carol's answers to the post-program survey showed a marginal yet potential shift in her self-perception. At the end, she said, she "sometimes" walked in authority (Statement 5) but chose to disagree with the statement anyway. Walking in authority has to do with taking ownership of our responsibilities, which is something Carol was reluctant to do regarding her thought life. Carol had wrestled with negative thoughts about others and fears of abandonment and had lost the battle for most of her life. Having called her attention to her responsibility to take her thoughts captive, I saw her fight with

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43. Christopher Barber, "On Connectedness: Spirituality on the Autistic Spectrum," *Practical Theology* 4, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 201-211. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 21, 2014). 202-203.

44. Carol, interview by author, Session 6.

45. James, interview by author, Session 1.

46. Barber, 206.

her thoughts – perhaps for the first time – and sometimes fight with me. One day, she got the victory and then let it slip out of her grasp; another day, she woke up in a funk but after prayer, worship, and Bible study, was on top of her game. She learned some of her own limitations, which may account for her flux score of -1. However, this may not constitute an unhealthy shift. It may be evidence of the development of a more healthy and normal attitude about life.

James claimed friends “stick together” and that he was a good friend; but he did not develop friendships at the church because “there’s not much people I can.”<sup>47</sup> He perceives himself as a person who cannot share personal details about his life and who is inactive as a friend, liberator, and vulnerable person. He does not believe he is a nurturing person or that he makes a difference in others’ lives. His use of modifiers in the interviews was sparse, sticking to short answers. Like others, he favored certain interview questions by speaking more about them than any others. In fact, Question 3 (How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk) was his top choice in both the pre- and post-program interviews. The only significant change measured during the six-week program was an increase in positive modifiers, which may signify a positive change in attitude. Though my proposal to James was that he stop thinking of himself as “weird” and that he see himself as God saw him, the post-program survey and post-program interview showed his answers to the statements and questions did not improve. In fact, the more he talked about his life and the answers to the questions, the more sure he seemed to become of his problems.

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47. James, interview by author, Session 1.

Bobby appeared to benefit from the program. At the beginning of the program, he defined a friend as someone you have fun with. However, his grasp of social responsibility grew as the sessions continued. In Session 6, he said he had an obligation to help people get jobs done in the church “because that’s part of being friends.”<sup>48</sup> Not only did he show he knew the calling/responsibility of mission; he grasped his role as a friend of fellow believers – he was an agent of mutuality, mission, and companionship. His favored questions showed he was interested in being an agent of vulnerability (Question 10) and an agent of liberation (Question 8) as well. The post-program survey showed marginal change. However, just as Cherie had only one possibility for change in her survey answers, Bobby only had one statement to improve: “I walk in authority.” During the program, Bobby took authority over the fears that immobilized him at bedtime and put an end to night terrors.

Emily entered the program with the lowest survey scores of all, disagreeing with five of the nine self-perception statements. In other words, she did not believe she was a creative person, a positive example to others, an outward-focused person, a nurturer, or a good friend. She favored the agency of companionship and practice of mutuality questions (6 and 4 respectively), perhaps out of guilt for having not been a good friend or a good mother (as far as her perception of herself was concerned). By the end of the program, she still held onto the belief that she was not a creative person; but she agreed to all the rest of the statements. She began to see herself as an agent of mutuality as well. She showed the highest level of positive change in self-perception and her view of Faith Church as a potentially unified body.

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48. Bobby, interview by author, Session 6.

Even though, in the final session, he did not think he improved, Bert showed some of the most dramatic changes of all participants. Though he wondered if his problem was clinical depression, it occurred to me that he may have just been suffering from burnout because of his perfectionism in pursuit of the perfect church. According to Joseph, et. al. "Clergy burnout can be seen as a feeling of being devoured from within, feeling emotionally exhausted and ministering from a posture of nothing left to give, that is, a decline in the ability to experience joy or to feel and care for others."<sup>49</sup> Miner noted that clergy burnout is very common in the first year of ministry and can be linked to personality issues.<sup>50</sup> Joseph agreed and suggested that potential ministers with high levels of neuroticism and low levels of extraversion should be "identified and assisted in helping them to overcome these personality issues through further training and/or personal therapy."<sup>51</sup> Bert claimed to be an INFP (Myers-Briggs personality), which is alleged to be an idealist who is on a "never-ending journey in search of their identity."<sup>52</sup> This may explain Bert's continue quest for something more.

Bert's interviews showed he favored Questions 13 and 11, which may have meant a strong interest in the calling to liberate others and the calling to companionship. His increased use of positive modifiers, which was the highest percentage of all the adults, showed his attitude shifting toward the development of deeper friendships in the church.

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49. Eugene Newman Joseph, et al. "The Relationship between Personality, Burnout, and Engagement among the Indian Clergy," *International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 276-288. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 13, 2014), 277.

50. Maureen H. Miner, "Burnout in the First Year of Ministry: Personality and Belief Style as Important Predictors," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10 (2007): 17-29.

51. Ibid., 287.

52. Michael E. Lanphere, *In His Image* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), 196.



He entered the program claiming he did not accomplish mission with others and was not a viable part of a unified body and ended the program with a complete reversal of these perceptions. Given more time, it is my hope that he will more completely trust the work God is doing in his life.

### **Discussion: Problems**

Despite my delight in the results of the program, I noticed several variables that may have contributed to a compromised set of data. These variables included my limitations as a counselor and the limitations of the treatment.

I found that my own limitations as a counselor may have skewed the results of the program. Though I had experience as a radio show host, newspaper interviewer, and arm-chair counselor prior to becoming a pastor in 2012, my ability to conduct a quasi-clinical counterview was deficient. I had no prior professional training in pastoral counseling with the exception of one course in graduate school. My laidback style of interviewing and counterviewing may have negatively influenced the comfort level and responses of the participants. My inexperience as a narrative therapist may have negatively affected those whose problem stories were deepened because I allowed them to constantly talk about them (i.e. Bert and James). The idea of narrative therapy is that people discover and adopt alternate stories of their lives -- not to keep mulling around in the same form of self-pity. Counterviewing is a means of getting people outside of their comfort zone -- the comfort zone of self-pity -- so they can discover the positive truths about their lives that they have ignored.

The limitations of treatment may have contributed to a low level of positive results. The length of the program (six weeks), for example, did not provide enough time for narrative therapy in a pastoral setting to produce appreciable results. Though psychologists who have used narrative therapy claim brilliant results within a six-week timeframe,<sup>53</sup> the change in most participants within this program were marginal. Building trusting relationships is a long process. This may explain a suspicion I had that some participants were not being completely candid with me. The longer we talked, the more came out. In fact, new significant details were still emerging from some of the participants in the sixth session. It became clear to me that six weeks was not enough time to uncover the whole “life story” – especially for people who have a lot to hide (i.e. high shame events such as addictions, criminal convictions, or painful traumatic events). I do not doubt that participants were comfortable with me and with the questions I asked in most instances. However, I have to wonder whether the reservoir of personal information they chose to draw from was as deep as they could go.

In some cases, the questions in the pre-program and post-program interviews were insufficient to produce the data required for proper evaluation. Questions 11-15 of the interview only required a “yes” and “no” response, which did not give participants opportunities to speak at length using modifiers. Instead, the questions should have asked for their response to someone who may question their calling to companionship, missionality, liberation, mutuality, and vulnerability. Question 14 specifically failed to measure the calling to mutuality, for it asks “Do you have an obligation to take charge of your spiritual formation?” Instead, it should have asked, “How would you respond to

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53. Madigan, 7.

someone who said you are not obligated to grow spiritually within the context of relationships with other believers?”

Another problem with the treatment was the fact that it was administered by a pastor as part of a D-Min thesis project. In a professional counseling setting, clients pay for services because of a serious and/or chronic mental health issue -- with the intention of getting better. Within a pastor/D-Min student setting, there are at least four significant nuances that do not match this situation. First, the pastor/student is the one who initiates the sessions, which places the participant in the position of being the recipient of counseling that is sometimes construed as unsolicited advice – much like that of a person who asks another person out for coffee with ulterior motives. Second, the mystique that surrounds a pastor/student may hinder people from truly opening up, because they are afraid of tarnishing their relationship with the pastor. Third, the participant does not pay for pastoral counseling, often causing the participant to take the counseling for granted – thus not taking it as seriously as one would if payment was involved. This also made it problematic to administer the treatment in a timely manner. None of the participants were able to attend the sessions concurrently. In fact, none of the participants could attend all six of their own sessions within an uninterrupted, six-week period. Two congregants who agreed to participate never found time to do so. Therefore, the entire program took an average of nine weeks per person and was spread out from March to November, 2014. In addition, the signing and sending of the greeting cards was a difficult task. Everyone's schedules varied; and it was difficult to catch anyone at a time when he or she was available for the half an hour it took to sign each one. It was my original intention to have a greeting card for each member of the church. However, with the time constraints of the

program, I found it necessary to limit the card recipients to only those who participated in the program. Even then, the cards were not completed by the end of the program. They were not given to participants until after the program was completed. Finally, the reasons most of the congregants in the program agreed to participate was not because of a serious or chronic mental health issue, but because of their affinity for the pastor, which meant the participants did not enter the program thinking about problems they needed corrected in their thinking. This made it my task to establish that they had a problem. At least two results ensued:

1. I ran the risk of “pathologizing” people who had no problem to begin with
2. Some participants did not recognize shortcomings in their inner dialogue until their six-week program was nearly finished.

Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of the treatment was its intended implementation outside of the context of servanthood. The program, though it acknowledged the need to conduct the therapy within the context of the community of concern, did not include active involvement in the ministry of the church or in the lives of church members. However, without servanthood, a Christian cannot truly find freedom from oppressive thoughts. Turner’s three phases in the ritual process suggest that the first two steps toward the development of healthy *communitas* are separation and liminality. Separation is the phase in which people completely die to their former life, completely abandoning the world they live in to pursue assimilation into the new culture. This matches the starting point of a transformative walk with God according to Jesus Christ: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross

and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:24-25, NRSV).

In Turner’s second phase (liminality), people enter a lifestyle of humility -- sometimes abject humiliation -- in which they acknowledge they are not their own and they own nothing. “They must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew.”<sup>54</sup> This corresponds to a second point of transformation according to Christ: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matt 20:26b). Jesus modeled servanthood – even in the face of ingratitude -- and instructed his followers to follow in his footsteps (John 13:15). Liminality produces a new paradigm of servanthood as a means of developing relationships within the *communitas*.

Certainly, the program was implemented within the context of people’s community of concern. In fact, most of the participants presented a different aspect of unhealthy self-talk but were helped by their communities of concern. Bert struggled with a feeling of illegitimacy and was only able to really break free of it after many people gave him opportunity to feel welcome and valued. Emily was plagued by invidious comparison that made her ashamed she was not the woman she was supposed to be. After being asked to provide support to the pastor that forced her to come outside her comfort zone, she laid aside her delusions of inadequacy and hosted a women’s brunch, took charge of a ministry fundraiser, and recruited more women for Sunday school. Carol was immobilized by negative imaginations but was able to replace deception with truth after

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54. Turner, 95.

many of the women of the church and I came alongside her to pour out love and support in ways that could not stand up to internal slander.

However, there is a pivotal problem in making the community of concern a resource. Instead of helping the participant to see fellow churchgoers as people, it makes them see churchgoers as objects they can receive from. Relationships are not just about an individual receiving (taking) from others; they are about giving and taking in individual and cooperative settings between clusters of interconnected people. In this sense, narrative therapy, in its original form, ironically makes objects out of others. The outcome may be a more self-confident person; but it may also produce a person whose self-talk is that of a self-centered consumer. This is counterproductive, because disconnected consumerism is part of the problem – not part of the solution.

In the church setting, as I observed, a pivotal part of the therapy was the parishioner's active involvement in service with the pastor's relational support. This was an addition to the treatment that was not in the original plan but organic and necessary as the sessions unfolded. As the parishioner and I talked, it became clear that one of the key elements lacking in each person was an opportunity to test healthy self-talk within the context of healthy relationships. Indeed, of those who participated in the program, three of the six became more actively involved in ministry in the church before the end of the program. Those three (Bert, Emily, and Bobby) showed the highest level of positive change compared to those who did not (Cherie, Carol, and James).

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **REFLECTIONS**

Despite the problems I had in the implementation of this model, a revised narrative therapy program appears to be a valid treatment for those who appear disconnected from others at church. Positive effects were demonstrated in each participant in this six-week program, including the development of relationships, a clearer understanding of self in the context of God's plan for the church, and the establishment of a lifestyle of servanthood. A more thorough study would likely reveal more about how narrative therapy can play a role in these and other effects.

Based on the transformations that began during this program, I learned valuable insights into the role of the pastor as a shepherd that, if implemented to a greater degree and for a longer period of time, may contribute to the spiritual and numerical growth of Faith Church.

#### **Breaking the Problem Story Habit**

The first obvious transformation was the realization that there was an unhealthy theme in each person's life story. Even those who thought they had a perfect childhood and stellar spiritual experience found elements about their thought lives that needed improvement. However unobtrusive they are, these are problem stories -- bad habits that must be broken so we can be free to experience *communitas* in our local churches. They are scripts we recite over and over to talk ourselves out of relationships. When a pastor

brings to our attention truths that we have either deliberately or unconsciously left out of our scripts, we are confronted with discrepancies in our stories. In doing so, we are made aware of our responsibility to reconcile our scripts to what is true about us and our place in the body of Christ.

Diversity is common in most people's mental frameworks, based partly on personality type, gender, generational differences, education, definitions, and expectations. Many of these differences have an impact on our spiritual well-being. However, none of them are adequate excuses for living in bondage to an oppressive thought life. Change happens when we take authority over our thoughts. Of the six participants in this program, the three who finished the program still voicing a negative outlook on their involvement in the church (Carol, Bert, and James) were also those who claimed in the post-program survey that they did not walk in authority. It is my guess that no matter what improvements are made to their relational mosaic, use of modifiers, or responses to interview questions, they will likely continue to let their problem stories drive them away from others in the body of Christ unless they deliberately break the problem story habit.

In church growth ministry, it is crucial that pastors and other counselors give people opportunities for speaking freely and candidly about their relationships with others in the church without being labeled or punished. In one-on-one interviews, we must resist the urge to correct every shred of ignorance or half-truths and instead look for themes -- the underlying roots of the problem stories that divide us -- and address the problem stories, at first, only as a group. A pastor or counselor who resists the urge to



label people and sees his or her parishioners as multistoried has taken the first step to assimilating them into the body.

### **Restorying the Relational Mosaic**

Breaking the habit of disconnection is easier done when healthy relational paradigms are formed -- the second transformation that began during this program. This sort of change requires (1) re-examination of the old relational paradigms (problem stories) to determine points of departure from the truth, (2) commitment to focal truths that make up a healthy relational mosaic, and (3) deliberate action to prefer focal truths to erroneous ideas. Points of departure include ignorance, lies, and half-truths that cloud our minds so we cannot see ourselves and the church the way God sees us. Paul wrote about such focal truths:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil 4:8, NRSV).

Notice Paul states that our deliberate action to direct our thoughts in these ways places God's peace as a guard (Greek: *phroureo* = military guard<sup>1</sup>) over our hearts and minds. There is no greater protection against problem stories that fragment the body of Christ than to see ourselves as people created in the image of God with the capacity to love, identify with others, share mission, set people free, and unashamedly reveal our true selves to each other.

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1.. Thayer, 658.

In pastoral ministry, we must be ready to walk our people out of darkness and into the light. We must direct them into the focal truths of God's word -- to help them see the church as a place for growing together into one missional whole (Eph 4:11-16). Our people need to see the church as the vehicle by which "the rulers and authorities in heavenly places" can learn the multifaceted wisdom of God (Eph 3:10, NRSV), as an impregnable force against wickedness (Matt 16:18), and as a spotless bride that Jesus continually nurtures (Eph 5:25-29). In addition, we need to help them discover their connection as members of this amazing and venerable body. That is the relational mosaic we are enculturated into.

### **Confirming It in Service**

One of the main reasons for this program was to connect people at Faith Church to each other, which would hypothetically translate to more effectiveness in Faith Church's impact on visitors and on people in the community -- and thus spiritual and numerical growth. By the end of 2014, Bert was thriving in children's church and worship team ministry, Emily was finding joy in leading the women's Bible study, and Bobby had become the church drummer. Four of the six participants took part in the production of a Christmas dinner theatre which resulted in record attendance (100 people for two nights). By serving, people discovered the God-given traits that were inside them -- their capabilities to take away aloneness, to share mission, to set people free, etc. They learned the truth about who they are in Christ and a glimpse of how valuable they are in the church. They would not have learned so deeply if they had not taken time to serve.

Pastors and other counselors must provide disconnected people with a platform for involvement in the lives of others -- specifically with ways to serve. Leadership does not count, for leadership is often guided by personal interests and has its own rewards. Servanthood must provide a service to at least one other person that (1) is meaningful to the recipient, (2) stretches the servant beyond his or her comfort zone, and (3) does not require compensation. When people serve in this way, they learn the value of dying to themselves and develop a sense of their own capabilities that go beyond what they ever expected. They connect to others on a spiritual level that goes beyond Sunday morning mingling.

The implementation of this model for pastoral ministry has the potential to transform many members of the church in America and create the *communitas* so many are looking for.

### **A Model for Older Adults**

Although there is potential for church growth through narrative therapy, it is possible this model will not be successful among older adults who are enculturated to a Builder Generation mindset. This includes people born before 1946 and those on the cusp of the next generation (born between 1946 and 1955), who value privacy above vulnerability.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, people from the older generation may tend to resist exposing their personal lives because speaking freely about negative feelings may be construed as betraying their generation, God, or church leaders -- or as being weak (which can be

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2. McIntosh., 40.

considered a betrayal of self). If too much emphasis is placed on vulnerability, they may resent those who pressure them to do so and detach themselves even further.

Nevertheless, a growing church does not need to censure its elders or leave them behind just because they do not want to participate in the newest model. In fact, the senior citizens in our midst provide the community of concern that supplements narrative therapy with the model found in Genesis 2:

**Companionship** -- Our seniors are some of the most reliable friends a person can have, providing a listening ear and an objective voice. They stand with us in times of trouble. They lift us up when we fall. They commit themselves to community.

**Missionality** -- The Builders and Boomers in our church strive with us in one mind and spirit for the gospel. They may not ask for help; but they are willing to help and/or delegate tasks to get the job done. When they are finished, they share the task of cleaning up and celebrating our corporate achievements.

**Removal of Limitations** – With the wisdom of the ages, our elders see problems as stepping stones to a brighter future. They help us to step back and see the big picture, remember what we left behind, and be thankful that we are free of the past. They treat our problems as minor parts of a more wonderful whole.

**Oneness/Mutuality** – The older generation is full of people who have learned the value of others, who know that every person who enters the church is legitimate in the eyes of God. They believe that every person belongs and are genuinely surprised when people detach. Like doting grandparents, they have each one in their heart – even those who have been out of fellowship for years. They may be silent; but they are not afraid to come together and make some noise in solidarity.

**Freedom to Be Oneself** – Christians born before 1955 have learned to welcome people no matter where they come from or what they have done. They are free to be themselves and want others to enjoy the same freedom. They do not fret about great things they have not yet done or spiritual growth they have not yet seen, but trust the Lord that “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion” (Phil 1:6, NRSV).

Even if they spurn our new programs, the elder believers in our churches participate significantly by posing as models for the relational mosaic we construct in our psyche. Whether we assimilate more people into the body through narrative therapy or through organic relationships with the older believers, we are building *communitas* – a more healthy, robust, and resilient culture of common transformation.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM SURVEY**

**PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM SURVEY**

1. I am a creative person.	Agree	Disagree
2. I am a positive example to others.	Agree	Disagree
3. I make a difference outside of my closest relationships.	Agree	Disagree
4. I am a nurturing person.	Agree	Disagree
5. I walk in authority	Agree	Disagree
6. I am a good friend.	Agree	Disagree
7. I accomplish missions with others.	Agree	Disagree
8. I am not afraid to share life stories openly with others.	Agree	Disagree
9. I am a viable part of a unified body.	Agree	Disagree

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PRE- and POST-PROGRAM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**



## **PRE- and POST-PROGRAM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Practice**

1. How often do you contribute to the development of friendships within the church?  
(companionship)
2. How often do you accomplish a mission with someone else in the church?  
(missionality)
3. How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)
4. How often do you connect with others at church? (mutuality)
5. How often do you share something personal with someone you know from church? (vulnerability)

### **Agency**

6. How good of a friend are you? How do you define friendship? (companionship)
7. How do you work with others to accomplish tasks? (missionality)
8. How capable are you of helping others overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)
9. How do you feel about being a member of a unified body? (mutuality).
10. How comfortable are you with being vulnerable to others in your church?  
(vulnerability)

## Calling/Responsibility

11. Do you have an obligation to deepen friendships with people at church?  
(companionship)
12. Do you have an obligation to accomplish missions with others at the church?  
(missionality)
13. Do you have an obligation to help others overcome negative self-talk? (liberation)
14. Do you have an obligation to take charge of your own spiritual formation?  
(mutuality)
15. Do you have an obligation to seek relationships with fellow believers in which  
you can feel comfortable sharing your personal life stories with them?  
(vulnerability)

**APPENDIX C**  
**EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

## PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**Table 17: Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Cherie**

Question	Pre-test	Post-test	Coding & Observations
1.How often do you contribute to the development of friendships within the church?	That's an interesting question. Well, I suppose every time I interact with someone it would contribute. I rarely interact with people more than Sundays however. Your family probably is the only family I interact with other than Sundays. We live out of the town and we don't live near anybody. (50)	Just once a week, if that. (6)	NO CHANGE: NO/NO. However, the more concise answer in the post-program interview suggests a more organized mindset regarding the development of friendships at the church.
2.How often do you accomplish a mission with someone else in the church?	Every time that I perform duty in the nursery, that's helping part of the team accomplish the task of making sure our little ones are safe and looked after. There's four of us, so once a month, I "hands-on participate" in that I suppose... I...participate in worship, which is a task. I have done a	None that are spoken unless nursery might be a mission. I don't know if you can accomplish it because it's an ongoing mission. (23)	NEGATIVE CHANGE: YES/NO  Although she seems more concise and modest post-program.

	drama, rarely. I'm willing to do tasks. (63)		
3.How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk?	<p>It depends on if I'm in the conversation. Sometimes others are trying to figure out what to do about negative self-talk, but I don't specifically take that information and go and seek out and help. Just last Sunday I was able to do something I think. So that was good. I had an idea that I threw out into this person's life and she grabbed ahold of it and said, "I'm going to do that!" (75)</p>	<p>Maybe I should change my answer for this one. Maybe I should say every day. When you first asked me this one, I wasn't even thinking about my husband because I ignore negatives in my own family. I was just thinking of something else in the forefront. But I guess, every day...well not every day. With young boys and my husband, there's negative things going on. Even when Teddy comes up sometimes. "I don't want to see my brother." (79)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: YES/YES. Though she showed no change in her general answer (YES), her perception of her role as a liberator in her family as changed. She now sees her family as a potential victim of negative self-talk.</p>
4.How often do you connect with others at church?	<p>Just every week...as long as we're here.</p> <p>How we connect with them? Not very...depth. Because neither Bert nor I are conversationalists, really. I've been trying to get a little more depth in conversation but Sunday morning conversation for me has always been, my whole life, just "hi." And</p>	<p>No change. Is that an answer? I don't know what I said before, but I'm sure there's no change. How often do we connect with people, well, you know it's just whatever is on Sundays.</p> <p>I work. So I don't have church people calling me through the week and talking</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: NO/NO. However, the reason (or excuse, as she says) for her not connecting has shifted from her personality type to her lack of proximity to the people of the church and lack of attempts.</p>

	<p>that's it. And then...you know... during snack time we still sit with Teddy soon hopefully he won't need us there. And Then that would open a little more venue for socializing. (82)</p>	<p>to me like high school, like in high school when they're like "Hey what's up? Whatcha doing?" I was picking up that computer today and the mom's son said, "Hey mom, can I have somebody come over?" And she didn't even ask who it was, she just said yeah. I'm like wow that's high school for you. You can just get together. This is not high school I live far away and there's all these excuses so I don't make efforts to get together. (134)</p>	
<p>5.How often do you share something personal with someone you know from church?</p>	<p>I suppose it depends on what's going on in my life and how often I get to attend Sunday School because that's probably the main venue I would share something like that if I join in on the women's Sunday school class. But just a guess, maybe once every other month. (51)</p>	<p>It depends if something share-worthy comes along. With my personality, it's not very often. I'm always amazed. Some people share things all the time. I don't think about... even like things at work, I had an employee review with my two big bosses and my two supervisors and they would ask me questions about things I do, my jobs.</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: NO/NO. In the pre-program interview, she appeared more concise. However, she appeared more reflective in the post-program interview, attempting to identify the reasons why she did not share (i.e. personality type, shyness, or practicality). She may be wrestling</p>

		<p>And I just kind of give them the facts "Here's my jobs." And then one of my supervisors would chime in and elaborate and tell them all of these wonderful things I'm doing. And was like, "Okay, yeah, I do that too." So it must be my personality type that I don't like talking about myself and uplifting "hey, I'm doing all of this and I'm doing all of that." So maybe it would be the same in a social setting or in a church setting Maybe I just don't like to say all of these things that I'm accomplishing or doing. But when I do make a mental note of "hey God did this in my life this week," I try to tell somebody. Because there's not too many times when I actually think "Oh yeah, that was a time." I mean there's many times that go by that was like "you know..." but there's some that are more speakable.</p>	<p>with this question.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION: POST-PROGRAM</p>
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		<p>[Sharing needs] is harder, especially when it comes to a prayer time, a prayer need time. And it's not so much anymore because it's such a small group. But when so many people are chiming in "Oh we need this and we need that and I need this and I need that." And I'm like, "There are so many needs already, may as well not say mine and I'll just keep going and going. So I do hang back sometimes with that. Yeah, I suppose I speak less about my needs, especially cause sometimes needs go more than just one time usually. It's a long-term need. So does that mean if you ask for the need once do you have to keep asking for the need over and over and over and your peers will get sick of you hearing about it. It's good to pray about it. (367)</p>	
6.How good of a friend are	I would like to think I'm a good friend. To those who consider me	To my good friends, I'm a really good friend. Is that a good	NO CHANGE: YES/YES. No significant change



<p>you?</p>	<p>a friend, I don't know. [A friend is] someone you feel comfortable with whom you're willing to support if needed.</p> <p>I'm going to say yes [I am a good friend], because I'm working on self-confidence, here.</p> <p>My definition of a friend I think is more general than Bert's specifically because it sounds like. And I don't know if we want to bring other people into this conversation, but when we talk, it always feels like he has such a limited number of friends. He can count them. "These people are my friends." But me, I...everybody at work I consider a friend, everybody in church I consider a friend. Sure, they're surface level friends. No I don't share deep dark secrets with everyone all the time. But I consider them friends. There's more of an acquaintance level of friendship that I still grasp hold of and call friend. Whereas if it's an acquaintance level</p>	<p>roundabout answer?</p> <p>I guess I'm a good friend.</p> <p>I have a friend in my neighborhood now that we go over to each other's houses every now and then. That makes me feel like high school again sometimes. Stop over and hang out at each other's porches. Not as often as I would like. I wish I could go over there sometimes. (74)</p>	<p>in her answer, although she seems to differentiate between "good" friends and "close" friends. In the pre-program interview, she comes to grips with her lack of close friends and points out that she has never experienced what it means to bond with close friends. She appears convinced that it is okay to have no deep attachments with other people.</p> <p>In the pre-program interview, she defined friend as "someone you feel comfortable with and are willing to support if needed." In the post-program survey, she does not rescind her first statement, but paints a picture of what it looks like (i.e. stopping over and hanging out). She points out at the beginning of the program that she and her husband have completely</p>
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	<p>I'm not sure if Bert really does. So in that comparison I feel that I do reach out and try to talk to people and try to count them as friends.</p> <p>The friends Bert does count are good friends. I have no friends like that who I can just.. always go.. He always stops by and sees this person and that person and talks to them. I don't drop in on anybody. I don't have friend time. A lot of people at work "Oh, I'm going to hang out with my girl friends tonight." I never do that. Is it possible to do that? Leave my family just to see a friend.</p> <p>You see even in high school and college, I never was part of a group. Sometimes you get a group that really bonds. The person at work that goes out with their girlfriends – those are high school girlfriends. It was such a group. They all went to high school in Troy and they're still there. They still do those things. I have never experienced anything</p>		<p>different definitions of friend.</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION: PRE-PROGRAM</p>
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	like that before. Not everybody does, I suppose. (353)		
7.How do you work with others to accomplish tasks?	<p>In general, I feel that I can accomplish tasks in two ways. I feel that I'm very flexible and that I'm a doer. So if somebody is the leader and is giving out things, I can easily follow and yes I'll do that I'll do that. But I can also flip the switch and become a project leader. In general that's how I can work. In the church specifically, though, I don't know if I've stepped up a whole lot to take on tasks and jobs except the ones I've mentioned before about nursery and watching Teddy. Bert and I have talked about that before, about Teddy during Sunday school. We're being a parent... But really when you look at it in a church role, we're also being a Sunday school/nursery worker during that time too. Even though the church as a whole doesn't see that. They see, "Oh that's a parent." But really, we're filling a need in the church it</p>	<p>It depends if I'm in a facilitative role or a teammate role.</p> <p>In the nursery? Apparently not very well and quietly. I like to be filled in on all the details but I don't go after... I don't question for the details. I like to be told the details. Like right now in the nursery I'm really confused. I don't do that job with a willing heart. Like last week, I was not really a willing heart. I was in there. And I was very thankful that Carol came and relieved me. But then she relieved me so I can give my testimony.</p> <p>And I knew I didn't have one. But I did want to listen and be a part of what was going on. And my parents were there. So I don't know if I used her offer a little too much. Cause I just stayed. When</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: YES/YES. Cherie appears to be the most passionate about this question. Her answers show she is committed to being heard. She uses the most words (398) of any participant in her post-program answer. Juxtaposing her career choice active in public service with her relative inactivity in the church, she appears to be a frustrated leader. She knows how to lead but does not because of modesty and a heightened sense of propriety.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION: PRE-PROGRAM</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION: POST-PROGRAM</p>

	<p>just happens to be our own kid. Occasionally I'm asked to bring food stuff to things and I can do that. (182)</p>	<p>Tammy started doing children's church, I said to Teri "She's on the roster" What's going to happen and Teri said "Oh, I'll take care of it. Don't worry about it." But she's never changed the chart. So every time Tammy's week comes around, I'm like "What do we do?" And Teri's always like, "Oh, I'll take it." But Teri wasn't there. And next week is Teri's week and she's still not going to be there.</p> <p>And so I don't know. Maybe she's figuring that "Oh, well Mandy's the only one in the nursery so I don't have to get somebody to take my place." But even before we had Mandy, if I was in the schedule and I was going to be away with Teddy, I would talk to somebody in case we had visitors. So I'm not working very well to get that job done just because I'm expecting communication but</p>	
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		<p>I'm not willing to do the communication. Because I'm not facilitating it and I don't know how to approach her about it. Therefore I'm doing it begrudgingly. So it's potential... I was in the nursery last week, part of this week, perhaps next week and then I'll be away for two weeks. So that's about five Sundays I'm kind of missing. So that kind of wears on you. Oh and then when I come back from vacation, it'll be my week in the nursery. So that's six weeks.</p> <p>We need to redo the rotation of the nursery schedule. (398)</p>	
8.How capable are you of helping others overcome negative self-talk?	<p>Yeah, I think I can be. I think that I'm comfortable with people coming to me with issues. That has happened before and I'm willing to get them a supportive answer to help them through it. (36)</p>	<p>I don't think I can cure other people's negative self talk.</p> <p>I try to open my mouth and help them. But sometimes it's not wanted help and sometimes it does nothing. Sometimes it does help.</p> <p>Or it's not something</p>	<p>NEGATIVE CHANGE: YES/NO. Cherie exits the program questioning whether she can really help people deal with their problem stories.</p> <p>#4 FAVORED QUESTION:</p>

		<p>you need at that time. Sometimes you need criticism. My senior year in college I had a big art critique. For whatever reason, I wasn't able to be there. And I had my professor cassette tape the comments. And there was not a single critique on the work. It was all good things. And I actually approached her later and said, "This isn't working for me. How can I go further if you're not giving me anything to change?" Or anything that's wrong? So I understand that sometimes you're just done with those uplifting "Your beautifuls" and you need real stuff to work on. (143)</p>	POST-PROGRAM
9.How do you feel about being a member of a unified body?	<p>In a way, I'm not sure if I can call it a hundred percent unified. Every face that comes through here is a familiar one. But we are all involved in different levels. And I would think to be unified you'd all have to be there on the same level to be a hundred</p>	<p>It's great.</p> <p>You can make connections with other people even other Christians that I met through my work, you've got a connection. You can go further with that.</p>	<p>NO CHANGE:</p> <p>YES/YES. She is looking for unity in Faith Church and sees it briefly once in a while. However, she side-steps the question.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION: PRE-</p>

	<p>percent unified and working towards the same goal. Although in some ways we are very unified. Last year at Richard's funeral I noticed that every family except for maybe one was represented at that and I felt very unified at that moment, thinking "We're all stepping together in supporting Shirley and supporting the church." Of course I say represented because our kids weren't there as expected. It's a small church, but in ways we can be very unified.</p> <p>(132)</p>	(28)	PROGRAM
<p>10.How comfortable are you with being vulnerable to others in your church?</p>	<p>I think given an opportunity I can open up quite easily. So I think I would be comfortable opening myself up to be vulnerable to use your words.</p> <p>Asking vulnerable questions is one thing and doing it at an appropriate time is another. Like after church one day you asked me how I was and I said fine and you called me a liar and it</p>	<p>I don't think I mind as long as I'm given an opportunity to. If it's a one-on-one setting like this or if it's a group setting</p> <p>A small group that discussion is lent towards that way. I don't mind opening up. Out in the lobby before and after church, no, not so much. I don't open up at all. If I'm given an opportunity, I don't</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: YES/YES. No significant change. She is willing to be vulnerable; but she needs the correct opportunity.</p>

	<p>was true but that wasn't the time to tell you</p> <p>So questions like that you just say, "fine" because that's all you want to share right then. "Go Away." Especially with all the people mingling around.</p> <p>That was a simple mingling question in a mingling atmosphere and I gave you a mingling answer. (119)</p>	really mind. (69)	
11. Do you have an obligation to deepen friendships with people at church?	<p>I am...yeah. I have recently. Not super recently but there was a time at this church that I didn't feel the obligation but maybe within the last year I feel the obligation because we want the church to grow. And as soon as you get a new face in that door, I am a long-term member of the church and it's my responsibility to reach out to them So I need to change my mindset When you first enter a place, you have the mindset that they minister to you they need to reach out to you, but then there's a turning point: "Hey,</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>If I am to participate in friendships at the church, you can't have one-sided friendships so I need to work at that so that I can be part of the body in a more unified way. (37)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: YES/YES. She shows that she developed this sense of calling previously. By the end of the program, she appears much more concise, perhaps more confident.</p> <p>#4 FAVORED QUESTION: PRE-PROGRAM</p>



	<p>wait a minute; I need to do the reaching now&gt;”</p> <p>So is it hard for me, but I’m trying a little more.</p> <p>(126)</p>		
<p>12. Do you have an obligation to accomplish missions with others at the church?</p>	<p>I suppose. If asked, I then have the obligation to fulfill. (11)</p>	<p>Yes, because somebody needs to do it. (laughs)</p> <p>Somebody needs to do it and we don’t have many doing things...It’s not...burnout because I haven’t been there too long. And I read a devotion about that last night. I think, “Am I still going to be upset about it?” I know I’m not supposed to, and it’s nobody’s fault. I just fight with myself...I haven’t said anything, so nobody knows. They probably don’t even think it’s an issue...If you’re gone, you need to talk to somebody else in the rotation, switch places. Like, when I was gone recently, I switched with the person after me, who happened to be Carol. And it happened to be Mandy’s last week, so she was thrilled. And then I checked</p>	<p>CHANGE:</p> <p>YES/YES. She does change slightly, though, since she started out saying she was obligated “if asked.” In the post-program interview, she showed more of a sense of calling.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION: POST-PROGRAM</p>

		<p>the two weeks I'm going to be away in Scotland, I won't be on the schedule so I don't have to worry about it. That's me. That's my gold in me. You say gold are the planners...I do more orderly stuff at work to keep work ticking along. And Bert keeps more of the household, ticking along. He does the laundry; I fold the laundry. That's about it. (197)</p>	
<p>13.Do you have an obligation to help others overcome negative self-talk?</p>	<p>If that person is talking to me, Yes I feel like I have an obligation. Maybe. I don't know. When the situation's there. I might not catch it. I don't know. Or if I don't know what to say, maybe I'll let it pass by. But just because I don't deal with it right then doesn't mean I don't feel an obligation to... (63)</p>	<p>I guess I have the obligation to respond to others talking to me...  To help them. (16)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. She still wants the other person to take the initiative; but she is favorable toward doing it.</p>
<p>14.Do you have an obligation to take charge of your own spiritual formation?</p>	<p>I suppose I should... Do I feel I'm doing it? I've never thought about it as an obligation. But nobody else can form my spiritual self but me</p>	<p>I guess I do. And I have to, cause nobody can form my spirit except the Lord with some participation on my front. (23)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE: YES/YES. She does change in that she is more confident in her answer.</p>

	I suppose. (30)		
15.Do you have an obligation to seek relationships with fellow believers in which you can feel comfortable sharing your personal life stories with them?	<p>I've never thought I've had an obligation to seek out those friendships, to be honest. Would I like that happening? Yes. I've never thought about seeking it. Because I never thought that it was necessary, I suppose. If you never had it before, "Is that something I need right now? Do I have time for that right now?" Deep relationship like that take time. You need to keep it up and visit and...</p> <p>When I say I don't feel I have an obligation, it doesn't mean I'm turning anything down. Of course, I would accept it if there was a reciprocated connection... (102)</p>	<p>I don't know if it's an obligation so much as it just happens... To share life stories with people? No. I must not feel the obligation to do that, though, cause I don't really have that much. Your family... I know at the beginning, I kept talking "Except your family when we get together" and we're sharing now. Yeah, that's about it, so... I must not be seeking it. But again, you can't really seek out intimate detailed relationship with a two-year old running around your feet. "Wait, wait, wait, hold that thought..." Yes? Okay go away... "And here's my personal private details...oh wait put that down!" (108)</p>	NO CHANGE: NO/NO. She likes the idea but still does not see it as an obligation.
Modifiers	<p>Interesting, hands-on, rarely, share-worthy, hopefully, negative, good, comfortable, more general, limited, deep-dark, acquaintance-level, not sure, good, flexible,</p>	<p>Ongoing, amazed, wonderful, uplifting, more speakable, harder, long-term, negative, good, really good, good roundabout, good, facilitative, team-</p>	

	doer, quite easily, comfortable, vulnerable, vulnerable, appropriate, mingling, mingling, mingling, not a hundred percent, familiar, hundred percent unified, very unified, very unified, very unified, comfortable, willing, supportive, not super recently, long-term, hard, honest, deep, reciprocated, spiritual, willing, surface level, not sure (28 positive/14 negative)	mate, not very well, quietly, confused, (un)willing, (un)willing, thankful, begrudgingly, one- on-one, great, negative, not wanted, not a single, good, done, uplifting, real, one-side, unified, upset, orderly, intimate, detailed, personal, private, always, good, sure, not willing (26 positive/16 negative)	
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**Table 37: Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Bert**

Question	Pre-test	Post-test	Observations
1.How often do you contribute to the development of friendships within the church?	I personally don't think I develop too many friendships in the church. Takes me a long time to get to know people and so I think I'm slow at developing friendships. (31)	I think, for me, the development of friendships is one of the more difficult areas for me personally. I don't think I've improved in this area, really. But the nature of our church... we don't have too many people to befriend. But if there's new people come, I try to make them feel welcome and so on. But to develop friendships, I think it all depends on your level of	NO CHANGE. NO/NO. Bert does not want to give himself credit for growth, even though he has contributed a great deal over the past six weeks to the development of friendships at Faith Church. As his wife, Cherie pointed out, he has high standards for friendships and does not feel he meets

		<p>friendship. I think my level of friendship... small talk and so on, I don't find easy. I want a deeper relationship and I can't seem to take the steps of doing the small talk... the stepping stones towards the relationship... and so that's what I think that's the difficult part for me. (122)</p>	that criteria yet.
<p>2.How often do you accomplish a mission with someone else in the church?</p>	<p>I don't think I've really done any mission projects within this church that I can recall... I don't remember any mission things we've done... I did help with the children's ministry, so that was... was an outreach of some form as well as contributing or helping with the worship on the Sunday services. Uh... I don't currently do that now. Both of... in a sense stopped at this time. (69)</p>	<p>Well, we're currently working on the Christmas madrigal, so in a sense that's a mission and I'm utilizing the gifts that I have to ultimately make it succeed. And the ultimate goal is to reach other people for God. It's not in your face evangelism – repent and come to Jesus – but it's little baby steps of touching people in a way of... in an environment that's not as intimidating way... And I think that's the idea of the madrigal. And so I'm using the gifts I have to contribute towards that... Yeah, I... see, it's funny I don't even think about [Children's Church and worship leading] because I just do them. It's part</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE. NO/YES. By the end of the program, he had become interconnected with several missions/tasks in the church.</p>

		<p>of what I do, in a sense. And so I don't really jump onto... I do have a gifting I think in working with children in a sense, I think. But I still wrestle with that area for some reason and I do enjoy using my abilities of vocally singing and so on and the guitaring (sic)... guitar. The guitar's getting better and so on. And so yeah, I'm using... Once again, it's using gifts towards the mission in a sense (188)</p>	
<p>3.How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk?</p>	<p>I'm at work. I work at a place. As I... I have a... I interact with different people there. And there's a work colleague who I was speaking to in that person's life on a frequent basis, trying to encourage them, motivate them, to reach their full potential. So there, more so than in the church, because I don't really have a lot of interaction with people in this church. But the church is bigger in a sense. It's not just</p>	<p>I don't think I do it too frequently. Actually, nobody in the church, in a way. I occasionally call a friend in England and I talk and support and encourage him and try to get him to think more positively about himself and about the future possibilities God has for his life. But I think it's an area that I struggle with myself and so I'm constantly wrestling with it and I need that support and that infrastructure of people to be accountable with but it all depends if people are willing to contribute towards positive... or more....</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. He helps others frequently; but he seems to only do it with others outside of the church.</p>

	<p>this building or this body of believers. It's beyond these four walls. (93)</p>	<p>Positive or negative? I think I gravitate more towards the negative. I don't know if that's an actual inclination or not. (119)</p>	
<p>4.How often do you connect with others at church?</p>	<p>I don't really connect other than Sunday. I don't really connect with others other than yourself occasionally. I don't connect with any other members of the congregation on a weekly basis. We used to, on the Wednesday, when... the prayer, we used to come and was involved in that way. But I don't come to that as frequently now, either. (60)</p>	<p>I don't know if I... the only connections I've stated is a... in the men's Bible study as well as with yourself, working with the madrigal thing or with worship. That's really the only connections I have with people in the church. Occasionally, there's a men's breakfast. That's another connection, but there's not too many connection points in a sense. (60)</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE. NO/YES. Even though Bert is down on himself for not connecting more, it is clear that he has changed in how often he connects with other people in the church.</p>
<p>5.How often do you share something personal with someone you know from church?</p>	<p>I think frequently... We have... on... We have a men's study in the morning and I normally share if there's something I need to... I feel I want prayer about and I share out with that. Also I share with yourself, the pastor. (43)</p>	<p>I think the men's study we have in the morning is a good opportunity to share. I do share to a certain level... personal things. So that's the kind of avenue I have. But... a venue to talk about personal things. We have a study that we're doing that opens up different questions and so on, which you answer and you share and you're</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE. NO/YES. He talks about this at length. He appears to be sharing more.</p>

		<p>being vulnerable by sharing your answer in a sense. You can actually say nothing and not be vulnerable, so that's the other aspect, so. I do try and contribute... That's a practice also that has to be developed. So you have to be comfortable with the people that you're with to the point that everyone is comfortable in the silence. And I think the church in general finds it difficult with silence. I can remember a church I used to go to, it was more liturgical, and they said, "Let's have a moment of silence." And two seconds passed and "Okay, the next thing..." You think, "That was the moment." It just... people have difficulty with silence, I think, unless it's cultivated.</p> <p>(186)</p>	
6. How good of a friend are you?	<p>I think I'm a pretty loyal friend. Once I make a friend, I try and keep them as a friend. There's times people drift away and so on. But longevity, I think, I keep friends pretty long. I have a friend</p>	<p>How good of a friend am I? I think once I've made a friend, you've got a friend with me. As I said after talking to a guy in England now for.. must be... must be what? Fifteen years now. He's been suicidal and everything. And I've</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. He see himself as a good friend to the few people he is deeply loyal to.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-</p>



	<p>back in England who I talk to on a regular basis, it's been probably some months. And he's very grateful that I keep that relationship going because he has struggled a lot with his walk. A lot of it is negative thinking and so on. He's to the point of being suicidal and so on also, and so I've encouraged him, motivated him, tried to make him focus back on God and so on. He's in a better place now than he's been for a long time. So that's... that's been probably about ten years I have been talking to this friend. And he's in another country and its for email and telephone so it's not face to face.... [Things would change at the church if we had more people]... because you gravitate towards different people and you have different ages and so on and</p>	<p>stuck with him and tried to encourage him and motivate him and he's doing a hundred percent better than he was before. So, I think I stick close to my friends, once I have made them. It's making them that's the hard part. Or is it my wrong thinking of... as you mentioned, there's different levels of friendship. And if you think your friendships are only meant to be deep friendships, that's putting me in a hole in a sense. You can have acquaintances or friends with you, but may not have that deep, open-your-soul to them type of friendship. You need both. And I see that, but I struggle with cultivating that (160)</p>	<p>PROGRAM.</p>
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	<p>who you can maybe related to better.</p> <p>And there's some people you relate to better than others.</p> <p>And so it's bound to make a difference if there's a bigger pool to draw from, so (209)</p>		
7.How do you work with others to accomplish tasks?	<p>I think I'm more of a... I'm more of a loner. I actually work on my own more than with others, but when I work with others, I can do so. But generally I work on my own a lot of the time, so... Even my job, as a [undisclosed], I'm [undisclosed], I'm on my own. I do facilitate and encourage and teach others how to do it, but then you leave them to it. You don't really work with them. So... so I'm not a team player, in a way. I think I could be, but I haven't had the opportunity to work with others as much, so. (111)</p>	<p>I think I work okay with other people. I generally have a pretty strong work ethic and I try and involve people in projects if I'm working with them. I can work well on my own and I can work well on a team. It doesn't really bother me. There's times it may frustrate me if the person's not getting the task done quickly enough. Cause I'm actually quite efficient at times and that frustrates me. But generally I have to take a step back and let them have a chance as well, because I have a tendency to just jump in and get it done. (106)</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE.</p> <p>NO/YES. He has moved from being a loner to a team player.</p>

<p>8.How capable are you of helping others overcome negative self-talk?</p>	<p>I think I'm... I'm able to encourage others more so than I'm able to encourage myself. I find it easier to motivate and encourage other people in finding their purpose and direction and motivating them into their particular gifting and so I don't have a problem with that as much. It's the other way around. I don't see the gifting and potential in myself, so... (65)</p>	<p>I think I'm better than I was, because... But the more aware of it you are, the more you try. I think I'm actually better at encouraging other people to overcome the negative self-talk than I am of encouraging myself. I think it's easier to encourage others, but then turn it around and try and talk to yourself, it's a different matter. So I don't really have a big problem with motivating and encouraging other people, because I believe God has great things in store for people. Again, he has a plan. It's to prosper them not to harm them, give them hope for the future and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But... and so I do that. I try and motivate and encourage people at my work and different people here and people in England who I talk to, so. Yes, I think I motivate others easier than myself. (150)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. He knows he is able -- more so than encouraging himself.</p>
<p>9.How do you feel about being a member of a unified body?</p>	<p>A member of a unified body? How do I feel about that? What's that mean? (laughs) Unified? (pause) That's a funny question for</p>	<p>It sounds like a wonderful dream. (laughs) We are united in Christ. Basically, to get a number of all these different people together under one roof is a</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE. NO/YES. He appears to be on the cusp of a new revelation of how unified the church</p>

	<p>me. What's a unified body? Is it here? Or larger? The whole church? I wouldn't say we're unified? Would that be possible? I'd like to see the church unified. But we have so many different denominations and splinters here there and everywhere. Are we unified? The only unified thing we have is Christ, yes. But... I think a team of people working together would get more done than just an individual, so yeah I'd like to work on a team. But you need a team to work with and you need to be like minded also. And you need to... people joined together under one vision of knowing what we're trying to achieve. We can't be united if we're not facing the same direction. Or going to a destination and one person going this way and the others going the</p>	<p>miracle alone and the united factor is Christ and nothing else would really bring us together other than that very factor. And so yes we are united because we have a relationship with Christ, through Christ and God sort of thing. So yes we are united, but then we are different. Different styles of things. Different ages, different music tastes. And all these little things start to rock the boat of unity in a sense (102)</p>	<p>really is.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.</p>
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	<p>other way. It just won't work, so there has to be a unity of direction of purpose of what is trying to be achieved, so... (186)</p>		
<p>10.How comfortable are you with being vulnerable to others in your church?</p>	<p>I think... I think I'm reasonably vulnerable at times, but I don't know if I fully reveal what's going on in my life to the whole church, so... There's aspects I do share, aspects I don't. But I think that's generally how comfortable and trusting you are with people. It all depends on the level of your relationship with the people that you'll reveal more about yourself or not, so... (70)</p>	<p>I'm not... I'm comfortable to a certain degree. But I think it's interesting... It depends on if you're able to relate to people or not. The more you're able to relate with people, the more comfortable you are with them to the point where you will be vulnerable and share, in a sense, deep secrets that you may be hiding. I think it's a... there's an element of trust that has to be cultivated with people. I think I can share with some people. But generally I don't know if I really know people in the church that well. I couldn't tell you everybody in the congregation's favorite color...or... that's for an example, it's silly, but that type of thinking. I don't know them that well... personal things. Or their personal interests. Do people really know personal</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. NO/NO. He shares and is willing to; but he is not comfortable because he has no loyal friends in the church.</p>

		<p>interests of mine or do I know the personal interest of others? Not really. So that's that point. I haven't really opened up, but that... another area is we only have a couple of hours on Sunday where we see each other. We say, "Hi" and "Bye." So you're not really... it's not conducive to build relationships as well. The idea is to come to church. You're worshiping and so no. You have fellowship time and I mingle a little, but most cases I'm dealing with Prescott and then I... I'll shoot off here and try and tune my guitar or whatever, so I'm not really sitting down and "Oh, yeah, I'm going to sit and really have a conversation with you today." (260)</p>	
11. Do you have an obligation to deepen friendships with people at church?	Yes and no, in a sense, because... as we shared earlier, when there's not a large amount of people to get to know, you'd think it'd be easier to get to know them in some cases. But in some cases, not.	<p>Obligation?! (mocking)          "You're obligated... It's a command. You MUST build up the good relationships with these people or you go to hell!" No. (laughs)          You should, yes. (laughs) That's a...          You're meant to and...</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE.          NO/YES. He does not like the word "obligation" but does see it as a responsibility -- even when people are not close to him.          #4 FAVORED</p>

	<p>When you've got a handful of people, you think you know them, but you don't know them. I think it's all depending on who you can relate to. I know it's the business of our lives. I don't think we actually make time for each other to even get to know each other. So am I making a concerted effort to get to know people? No... Obligation? I don't think if I feel obligated to do so, no. I... personally I believe it's... being sensitive to what God wants to do and trying to be a conduit to speaking into people's lives and the only way of doing that is actually by getting to know people. So yeah I don't know. It's a hard one for me.</p> <p>(168)</p>	<p>and might... would strive towards it. But. Like I said earlier... that's not an area that I blossom at in a sense. I need a lot of extra work on this area. Cultivating friendships. It's the very area that I'm struggling with at my work. I feel very much alone. I went to a Christmas party thing and never... nobody talked to me. But then I didn't talk to them. And so if...it says, "Be friendly and then they'll be friendly back to you." Type of thing. So I don't know if I'm very friendly at times. Maybe I'm more task orientated. Get the job done and you're making.... See other people goofing off and being friendly and I say, "You're wasting time; get back to work!" That type.... So there's that aspect. I think I'm quite legalistic at times and "There's no time for friendship. We're meant for working." So I have to loosen up a bit. And that's the area I find difficult. Cause, I think at times I get very legalistic. And then</p>	<p>QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>
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		<p>something God was dealing with me on this area was there was an axiom or whatever. It was L.A.W. but the Law is legalistic, but the law that God has given me is L.A.W. Love. Acceptance. And Welcome. It's the reversing of the legalistic. You need to be loving, accepting, and welcoming. And I think that's what the grace is about. The law of the land is judgment, but God wants love, accepting, and welcoming. And this is what God is kind of using to remind me to be more loving, more accepting, more welcoming of God and of other people. (308)</p>	
12.Do you have an obligation to accomplish missions with others at the church?	<p>I feel I do but I don't know how to fulfill the obligation. I don't know how to find the area where I would best fit to accomplish the task of mission... I don't know if I feel inadequate. I just don't know what to do, so... (47)</p>	<p>Do I have an obligation?! That's a...I don't like "obligation." That's the word. You're obliged. (laughs)</p> <p>I think that's the key. Basically, having a relationship enough that we're communicating so it's not becoming an obligation any longer. It just becomes a matter of the heart. You're doing it</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES.</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>



		<p>out of love. You're doing it as unto Christ. It's not doing it out of "I have to do this" or begrudgingly and... Or... I can't remember that story, but.... The servant asks to do this thing. He says, "Oh, I don't have time to do it." But then he goes back later and does it. I'm just paraphrasing it, but that type of thing. I'm like that I think at times. "Grrrr I don't want..." I'll go and do it and then I'm blessed and I'm doing it. But at times I'm not so obliging or wanting to... Should you? Yes, you should. (laughs) You should do mission. I think it's defining mission as well. I think it's a mindset again. "Oh the mission field. It's away in Africa, dealing with the heathen." But no. But I think you can go to that default at times. "Oh, the missions are not at your doorstep. It's going away to these tribes who don't know Jesus yet" type of thing. But yet there's people on our doorstep that don't know Jesus yet. And it's overcoming</p>	
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		<p>the fear to actually share your story of what God has done. Where would I be without Jesus right now? I've thought about this a lot. Where would I be right now if I didn't know Jesus? I have no idea. I probably would be in a gutter somewhere, an alcoholic or... could have fell into the abuse of drugs and could be dead and...</p> <p>Would I have gotten to heaven? I don't know. It's a sticky area again. But I know Jesus and I'm... having hope and confidence. So why doesn't that just bubble up and touch others? I think that's the point. There's times we don't appreciate what's been done on your behalf to the point where you're so in love that it just overflows, so. We get caught up in the cares and concerns of the world more, I think. That's for me anyway, so. (380)</p>	
13.Do you have an obligation to help others overcome negative self-	I think we all have an obligation to help people overcome their negative self-talk. And I'm conscious of my...	Well, I think it's basically yes, because we're... the Bible is what? Good News? And we're meant to be about spreading this Good	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES.</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-</p>

talk?	<p>I'm always negative in my own thinking and so I thank God other people are likewise the same, but we do not want to talk about it or share it, because we'll make ourselves to look incapable or inadequate. Whereas we want to be ministers of the gospel who have it all together. But we're not. We're all a mess in a sense, needing each other's support and help. And I think personally, I like to know or be given the tools to actually be able to transfer it forward, pay it forward in a sense. If we don't have the tools, we cannot then share how to help others, if we're not implementing them in our own lives if they're not working in our own lives, how then can you talk confidently to others and say, "Yes, this is working in my life." I don't</p>	<p>News, not bad news. It's meant to be Good News. And I think that's the problem. The Bible is so full of these promises, great promises, but we find them difficult to implement or don't believe we can implement them or don't believe... "that's not for me. That's for Joe Blogs down the road, but that... I can't believe that for myself." And so, yeah, I believe... it says "We're to encourage each other daily....of the coming of Christ" and so on. But I think it's... We were meant to be about more of an encouraging of each other of our faith rather than pulling down. But the... unfortunately, there's a lot of... sometimes a lot more pulling down than building up. But God wants us to be about rebuilding and the song Restoring... Restoration. I think there's a lot of people hurting out there... not out there but in this church... and then beyond the doors of this church. We have to feel comfortable with the message – that it's for us</p>	<p>PROGRAM.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>
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	<p>know if that makes sense. If you've been equipped and given the tools to help others, then you'll be more apt to talk to others about negative self-talk, because you've got something to give, something to offer. This is working for me, I'll give it to you. (212)</p>	<p>and we've got something to share and something to give that's worth giving. And we have to come to that point of believing that. And that's the hard part. The mind can play tricks with you and fear sneaks in. We do have an enemy who wants to pull you down as well. You have to recognize you have... we have a God who is for us, but we have an enemy that is not for us. And so... we sometimes forget that – that our wrestling match is not just about flesh and blood but about principalities and powers as well. And some people say, "Oh, what's that rubbish all about? Principalities and powers?!" But I think we do have an enemy. It could be the devil, but we do have an enemy in ourselves as well at times and that... speaks negatively and wants to pull down. The devil doesn't really get a chance at times, because we do it ourselves anyway, so... (359)</p>	
14.Do you have an	We all have an obligation. If we do	Yes, I do. And that's the very area I struggle with	NO CHANGE.

<p>obligation to take charge of your own spiritual formation?</p>	<p>nothing, the results are nothing. We can't grow unless you take charge of your own spiritual development. I'm... It's... I'm constantly trying to come to terms with who I am in a sense, so... that's one area that I know I'm not lacking in. I'm always trying to come to a knowledge of God and what he's trying to do in my life, in a sense, so... (75)</p>	<p>the most. I was recommended a book by a friend of mine just the other day, texted me this book title. He said, "It's a must have. Run out and get it right now!" is what he said in his text. This is it here. (flips open a book) <i>Success Is Not an Accident</i> by Tommy Newberry. It says, [reads from the book]. And so I've been thinking of this recently as well. If you don't plan to succeed, you won't succeed. It says here, also, [reads from the book]. And I think, you can get caught up in just the ordinary and not thinking of a God who is able to do great things through us. But our negative self-talk or, going back to default of "Who am I to aspire towards that?" So it's... so you can enter into that, being mediocre, rather than entering into the full potential that God has. And it's all about making an effort to try and direct yourself in line with what God wants. This is the very area that I struggle with all my life. Am I</p>	<p>YES/YES.</p>
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		<p>fulfilling the destiny and plan God has for me?</p> <p>But I have to make an effort to try and a) know what it is and b) walk in it. And this is where I wrestle with all the time. And I think it's because of my negative self-talk. I talk myself out of doing things. (240)</p>	
<p>15.Do you have an obligation to seek relationships with fellow believers in which you can feel comfortable sharing your personal life stories with them?</p>	<p>I think everyone's got an obligation to share their story of how God has intervened in their life. It's having the opportunity to do so. It's not just in these four walls here, it's in your life. And so I find it interesting, cause I work in a Christian environment so I don't think you get the opportunity to talk to people about what God is doing or how you can... share into people's lives because we're all so busy about doing what we're doing for God that we're not really want to hear what other people... what God's doing in other people's lives in a way, I think. But</p>	<p>You should. (laughs) No, basically as I've mentioned, I do try to cultivate friendships in the men's study. But there's only a little handful of people there. I think you naturally gravitate to people who are similar to your manner or personality or whatever or likes/dislikes, whatever. And so when you're... forced into relationships in a sense... In a sense, you are, because there's only a set amount of people going to this study and they go faithfully week by week, month by month, year by year. And they do it with gritted teeth and say, "Yeah, I love this." But you're still having fellowship and it's beneficial. But... I think it's gotten better in the</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. He answers the question in the post-program interview by giving evidence that he is doing it.</p> <p>#4 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>

	<p>there is a longing to see the reality of God working in my life and being able to interact with other people with... who are likeminded in a sense, so... (140)</p>	<p>men's study. I think I have become more open and... so that's good. So, no... that's beneficial. But in that forced environment at times, there's people you can fellowship with good and there's people like sandpaper and they're rubbing you the wrong way all the time. Generally, I'm not like that with most people, but it could be that they're always thinking or wanting to express the negative rather than the positive in a sense, but you still have to fellowship with them anyway. But overall, the men's study is my only place, other than yourself, that I do have kind of fellowship with other believers. At my place of work, it's not really conducive to it really. I'm there as a resource to help people find things, but I don't have really deep discussions about different things personal or whatever. That's my environment at work. I have one person who I do talk to, sharing a little, also. He's a work</p>	
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		colleague. But he shares with me and I share with him, but we've built that relationship again. (294)	
Modifiers	<p>Too many, long, slow, frequently, (not) frequently, frequent, full, pretty loyal, pretty long, regular, very grateful, negative, better, better, bigger, loner, reasonably, (not) fully, comfortable, trusting, funny, unified, (not) unified, unified, unified, like minded, joined together, (not) unified, unity of direction, (not) large amount, easier, handful, hard, best, inadequate, likeminded, spiritual, (not) lacking, negative, always negative, incapable, inadequate, mess, needing, confidently, more apt, negative (24 positive/24 negative)</p>	<p>more difficult, new, welcome, small, easy, deeper, small, difficult, ultimate, in-your-face, little baby, intimidating, funny, better, good, certain, personal, personal, different, vulnerable, not vulnerable, comfortable, comfortable, difficult, liturgical, only, frequently, more positively, future, willing, positive, neg., neg., actual, good, suicidal, hundred percent better, close, hard, wrong, different, deep, deep open-your-soul, pretty strong, well, well, not quickly, quite efficient, comfortable, certain, more comfortable, vulnerable, deep, favorite, personal, personal, personal, personal, another, wonderful, united, basically, different, miracle alone, united, very, united, united, different, different, different, different, better, more aware, actually better, negative, different, big, great, different, easier, good, extra, very, very much alone, friendly, friendly, friendly, task-orientated, friendly, quite legalistic, difficult, very legalistic, legalistic, loving, accepting, welcoming, judgment, love, accepting, welcoming, more loving, more accepting, more welcoming, basically, enough, just, begrudgingly, so obliging, wanting to, probably, sticky, just, so in love, just, basically, little handful, naturally, set amount, faithfully, with gritted teeth, beneficial, better, more open, good, beneficial, forced, good, wrong, most, still, deep, different, very, other, just, great, negative, mediocre, full, in-line, very, negative, basically, good, good, bad, good, great, difficult, daily, unfortunately, more, rebuilding, hurting, comfortable, hard, wrestling, negatively, anyway (102 pos., 58 neg.)</p>	



**Table 38: Pre- and Post-Program Interviews with Emily**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>	<b>Observations</b>
1.How often do you contribute to the development of friendships within the church?	Frequently. I don't know. How often do I do it? Almost every day, depending on who it is. (18)	Probably daily... Still kind of the same, dealing with phone calls, problems, and helping to diffuse situations... (17)	NO CHANGE. YES/YES.
2.How often do you accomplish a mission with someone else in the church?	Probably major events. We do one once a month, once every quarter.  I guess... every Sunday [I run the sound]... the Women's Bible Study.  Okay, weekly. (22)	I guess you could say every week, as far as getting... working together with the leadership of the church. Making sure that the service runs smoothly and classes run smoothly... bulletins are done. Yeah. Make sure receipts are taken care of, working on the play, working group... (47)	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. No change in "how often" but more of an explanation, including modifiers. She appears more organized in her thoughts.
3.How often do you help someone else overcome negative self-talk?	I don't know. Ask my husband. I try every day. I don't know how successful I am. I don't know that I've help him overcome.  I haven't heard too many people talk negatively. I guess there have been some breakthroughs once in a while. (44)	Daily? Phone calls... Negative talk, might not necessarily be self... Well, there is some self talk in there. There's some tearing down in there. Just...just got off the phone with her. You know... Family. I mean, that's... they're part of the church, too, I guess. But that's family. You know, so there's always that in there. There's always the boys and...	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. No change in frequency, but the object of her ministry has shifted from her husband primarily to her children and another church member.

		dealing with the boys and... getting them to not quite be so grumpy so negative, so whatever. You know (80)	
4.How often do you connect with others at church?	<p>Not too often. It's a hard question because my husband is part of the church and he and I connect all the time, I think.</p> <p>And my children. Outside of that, not too often. I mean, really connect? I don't know.</p> <p>Am I really close with anyone? No. Outside of my family, I'm not really close. I mean, I've had some... Occasionally, Maybe occasionally. Martha and I can sometimes. Sometimes Rose and I do, I guess. Not too deep. It's never really deep. Maybe a little more with Martha, but... Other than that, not... I don't know.</p> <p>Maybe I'm looking at something deeper. I don't have any deep relationships. I don't usually do a</p>	<p>Connect with them? Outside of Sunday morning, not too frequently... Don't... Some weeks are better than others, you know. If it's shopping time, she needs to go shopping. Of if she has a doctor's appointment, which it hasn't been for a while. You know, trying to get her to back off on some of her crises, so that there isn't a constant running over. Gotta check on this, gotta do this. So lately it's been a little easier. But it has its moments. Depends on the need. Depends on what's going on.... (92)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. NO/NO. No change in frequency but more focused on one person who appears to be burning her out. No mention of other women she connects with in the post-program interview.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.</p> <p>#4 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>

	<p>whole lot outside of the church, not a lot. I mean, occasionally, we get together for church activities, but other than that, I don't go out to lunch with them. I mean, I don't... Not usually, not ever. I've never been out... I haven't even been to some of their houses. I don't feel a close connection, but sometimes we see eye to eye on things. I guess there's a connection there. It's just not a strong connection. (193)</p>		
<p>5.How often do you share something personal with someone you know from church?</p>	<p>Sunday school, maybe. Probably just on Sundays, possibly during Sunday school. Maybe afterwards, but not usually. In the course of the Sunday school class. Probably about that. (27)</p>	<p>Not too frequently. Don't really have.... I mean, Sunday school class, I'm able to share, you know, within the context of the lesson. I'm okay with sharing personal things in that group. Outside of the Sunday school class? Not too often. You know, maybe a little bit in church people but usually it's just listening, seeing how their doing and not worrying about my own personal things, unless it comes up. (71)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. No change in frequency but more confident and organized.</p>

<p>6.How good of a friend are you?</p>	<p>How good of a friend am I? Hm. I like to think of myself as fairly loyal. Do I go out of my way? Not too often. Aw, that's not true. I don't know. I would be there for someone if they needed me. I would be there. Yeah, I guess I'm being down on myself too much. I'm there. If they need me, I'm there. I would be over to help out, whatever. If they need me. I don't have any close friends, but...</p> <p>I guess I'm rethinking it in my head, because I don't do a lot of... But I do. I do things. I guess I have to think about it. My first thought was, "I don't feel like I have a really close friend" But I do have people I talk to and that I help out. There are people who I will be there for. I will do what I have to do with them. If they</p>	<p>I guess I'm... I'm willing to... be there .... Sometimes begrudgingly. Depends on the situation and how much it's been....you know. You know, I'm usually pretty open as a friend. I'm... I don't know. (laughs) You know, it's not always... It depends on if I'm dealing with this one person. Sometimes, there are times when I'm like tearing my hair out I don't want anymore. But I'm growing in that I think,. I'm working on those attitudes. Working on learning how to... think loving thoughts (laughs). You know, it's not just... just the works. Not just willing to do the work, but doing without begrudging the situations. Without grumbling and complaining, do everything... So it's an ongoing process. It's a lesson. It depends on the intensity of the situation. Sometimes, you know (133)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE.</p> <p>YES/YES. In the pre-program interview, she seemed to define a friend as a "fairly loyal" person who goes "out of their way" to connect and who is there for people. In the post-program interview, her definition of a friend included being there for people and doing work for others, but also thinking "loving thoughts" – something she struggles with sometimes. He referred to her relationship with Carol as "dealing with" her.</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.</p> <p>#2 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>
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	<p>need me.</p> <p>I don't know if I'm too busy. Maybe I'm waiting for someone else to take the initiative because that's what I do. I don't usually take the initiative to say, "Hey, let's go out."</p> <p>I'm not a spontaneous type person. I'm not usually the one that initiates and I wait for other people to initiate contact even when I'm... almost all the time when I see them, when it's a kind of a casual contact at the store, I wait for them to look up. I'm not the one that runs over and says Hey. But sometimes I do. It depends on who it is, maybe. If it's someone... yeah. I just usually wait for other people. I'm not a go-getter. (285)</p>		
7.How do you work with others to accomplish tasks?	I think I work pretty well with people. I'll be there. I'll help them out. I don't take a lead position usually. But I'll go	What do I do? I do Sunday school lesson... Well, I do my lesson before Sunday morning. I have to read it before Sunday mornings.	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. She shifted in her focus from being a follower in the pre-program interview

	<p>and ask them what they need me to do. If they need me to do anything. It's kind of weird being who I am, because most of the time they say, "Oh no, no, you have other responsibilities. Go ahead." But I do what I can. I help out when I can. I bring food when I can, whatever. I think I work pretty well with people, get along with them well. (97)</p>	<p>Preferably not before that day... I'm usually up before the boys in the morning, so I'm in the shower getting my... and then I get my breakfast and I'm able to go and work on my devotions, while I'm eating my breakfast and then the kids are kind of waking up during that time and... you know, so it's usually fairly good in the morning unless people stop listening. Then it can get intense. Then it can get unraveled sometimes, but I think it's been better than it used to be. You know, just getting everybody out the door at the same time and then picking people up and... trying to get here.... Hopefully getting here in enough time that I can focus on greeting people and getting ready for Sunday school and not frazzled. You know, there have been some times when I have been late. We don't get there on time. You know, picking people up is... adds a new dimension to it, so we have to be out earlier</p>	<p>to a leader in the post. In the pre-program interview, she focused on how she works with people in the church. In the post-program survey, she focused on how she interacted with her children as she prepared for Sunday morning service. This may just show how many hats she wears.</p> <p>#1 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.</p>
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		<p>than normal, but pretty much most of the time it's pretty decent. It's been... I've got a pretty good routine going... Well, they're older. The kids are older. They're able to... They're all busy getting ready. They can get themselves ready. I don't have to get the kids ready. They can go pick out their clothes. They know how to get ready and dressed and.... If they want to eat breakfast, they get the breakfast. If not, they wait til after Sunday school. Which, they eat at church anyway, so it doesn't matter. But they're all old enough. It's just a matter of getting them up on time and getting them moving and going and... out the door at the same time. At the proper time. (323)</p>	
8.How capable are you of helping others overcome negative self-talk?	<p>It depends on the situation. I have done it. I've had times when it worked very well. As long as... I don't know, I guess I've never really... I mean, if you think of it... I don't know if I've ever really...</p>	<p>I think as I trust the Lord, to help me with it, I do better. As I'm... asking for his help and leaning on him, I don't know, when I try to do it in my own strength, I usually fall flat. Or I get upset, myself, and I end up taking on their negative feelings and</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. She seemed somewhat disorganized and unsure of herself in the pre-program interview. She appears to have never thought about herself as an agent of change in</p>

	<p>No, I've done my husband...I don't know. Ask my husband. How well have I done it? I guess I have. I guess, thinking of it that way, yes I have. I think I encouraged him enough, encouraged him plenty through our marriage. (85)</p>	<p>escalating in that. But as I take a step back and allow the Holy Spirit to work through me and give me the words, I think it goes a whole lot better. (89)</p>	<p>addressing another person's chronic negative self-talk. In the post-program interview, she was much more confident and discussed the Holy Spirit's role in helping her help others.</p>
<p>9.How do you feel about being a member of a unified body?</p>	<p>That would be amazing.</p> <p>I guess it depends on whether they agree with me or not.</p> <p>In general, I tend to be... I have my opinions about how things should be. I don't usually air my opinions and I will usually take a back seat in a church setting. I usually sit back and listen. I'm not one to argue. I may disagree with them. I know how to back off. In a church setting like that, I don't say a whole lot. I'm not one to be different and raise my hand and raise a ruckus because it's</p>	<p>That's a good idea. No, it's a good thing. The body needs to be unified. It needs to be working together as a team on the same thought processes and... it's important. And it's good to be involved. It's good to be... part of that, you know? (47)</p>	<p>POSITIVE CHANGE.</p> <p>NO/YES. In both the pre- and post-program interview, she exhibited an initial skepticism about Faith Church's alleged unity. However, she seemed to define unity differently. In the initial interview, she gravitated to a discussion about opinions and whether or not she aired hers. In her final interview, she treated unity as teamwork and involvement, something she saw at Faith Church.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-</p>



	<p>something different from what I believe in. If it's just the direction of a church, for the most part, I do fairly well, I think, if it's not something that's not doctrinally challenging. But I still probably wouldn't say a whole lot. I would want to know I knew what I was talking about and had a way to back up what I'm saying. I'm not usually very vocal in a group setting. Does that answer? (175)</p>		PROGRAM.
<p>10.How comfortable are you with being vulnerable to others in your church?</p>	<p>for the most part, most of the time, I'm pretty good. Especially the Sunday school class. We open up and I feel pretty free to share during Sunday school. I have shared some things that are pretty vulnerable. (38)</p>	<p>I guess it depends on the setting. Sunday school's a little more easy a little more laid back and I think I've been more vulnerable in the Sunday school. But the rest of the group? There really hasn't been a lot of opportunity to be vulnerable. You know, there isn't a super closeness with most of the people. They kind of do their own thing and you know it's all superficial. How you doing? (laughs) Glad to see ya. That kind of</p>	<p>NO CHANGE. YES/YES. There seems to have been no change in her level of vulnerability. In the post-program interview, she spoke of her lack of closeness to others and the superficial dialogue with people outside of her Sunday school group, implying that a prerequisite for being vulnerable is a venue for forming deeper relationships</p>

		<p>thing.</p> <p>They're... Although I think I have been in ... I think I've spoken in front of people, sharing my heart about something. Yeah, I've done that, like a testimony of sorts, you know. (115)</p>	<p>and conversations.</p> <p>#3 FAVORED QUESTION, POST-PROGRAM.</p>
<p>11. Do you have an obligation to deepen friendships with people at church?</p>	<p>Do I have an obligation? Yeah, probably. Biblically, yes. I do.</p> <p>I couldn't quote you scripture and verse, no. But yes, I do have an obligation to deepen friendships, encourage one another and build each other up. (37)</p>	<p>You mean deepen mine with them? Yes... Well, because we're part of the body. We're... God calls us to be together and to lean on each other and to trust each other and to help each other and love each other and.... That's what friendships are all about (48)</p>	<p>NO CHANGE.</p> <p>YES/YES. In the post-program interview, she spoke of "what friendships are all about." By stating that friendships are supposed to include a) togetherness, b) support, c) trust, d) helping, and e) love and suggesting such an experience would be a way to deepen her friendships with people at the church, she subconsciously implies that she is only on a superficial level of friendship.</p>
<p>12. Do you have an obligation to accomplish missions with others at the</p>	<p>Yes, I do. And not just as a Bible teacher. I may not make sure things run smoothly, but we need to work together. There are</p>	<p>Yes. You know, there's.... as part of the group, it's... he has a mission for each one of us. There's a mission for the church and we need to work together to meet</p>	<p>NO CHANGE.</p> <p>YES/YES. No change in the affirmation of this principle. However, her final answer was much more global</p>

church?	things that need to be done and we need to work together without arguing and complaining. (42)	that (34)	and God-centered.
13.Do you have an obligation to help others overcome negative self-talk?	Yes. The Bible says, "Encourage one another." If they have negative self-talk, they need to be encouraged. Build each other up. Strengthen one another. Stand with one another. Yes, we do. I do. (3)	Yeah. I mean, the word specifically says encourage one another. Build each other up. Support each other. Take care of each other. Make sure that no one is left behind. No one falls short. You know (36)	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. No change. In fact, both times, she uses the same Bible verse: "Encourage one another" (1 Thes 5:11)
14.Do you have an obligation to take charge of your own spiritual formation?	Yes, I do. How long have I been taking charge of it? Probably recently, since we've been here. I've been a Christian most of my life but... and I've known... Maybe I didn't do it super successfully, but I also wasn't the bad girl at school either. I was always following the rules. Maybe more rule driven rather than relationship driven. But I knew that. I don't think I was just doing it out of "because I have to." There was some	Yes, definitely... Because it's not up to anybody else for my own spiritual formation. It's between me and God. It's up to me to do and if I don't do it, no one's going to do it for me (39)	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. There was no change in her sense of obligation to taking charge of her spiritual formation. Her response in the pre-program interview gave some backstory to her answer, although she ran the risk of being verbose. Verbosity may be a sign of nervousness or guilt caused by a relatively inert spiritual walk for most of her Christian life. Her response in the post-program survey was

	relationship there it just wasn't real strong. I knew there was an obligation all along to follow after the Lord. But I think it really has been more recently that I really put more time into it and made it a priority to daily seek the Lord and spend time with him. (134)		much more concise, utilizing only a third of the number of words as the first response.  #4 FAVORED QUESTION, PRE-PROGRAM.
15.Do you have an obligation to seek relationships with fellow believers in which you can feel comfortable sharing your personal life stories with them?	Yes, I do. I think that's the main purpose of the Sunday school class. That's really the closest that we've been able to share. We've had some good conversations in there. (31)	Yeah, probably. Well, it's hard to get through... and its... and you know, I do so I guess so on certain levels. You know, there are certain people who are easier to talk to that are my age group, sort of. Do I have to be friends with everybody? Not necessarily. You know... but yeah I do on certain levels (60)	NO CHANGE. YES/YES. Her initial answer included evidence of her commitment to seeking these kinds of relationships. Her final answer appeared to back-step away from commitment, claiming she did not have to be friends with everybody.
Modifiers	Frequently, major, not too often, hard, not too deep, not really close, never really deep, little more, deeper, deep, (not) strong, negatively, fairly loyal, not true, down (on self) too much, (not) close, (not)	Probably daily, every, smoothly, smoothly, not too frequently, personal, not too often, little bit, personal, not too frequently, constant, little easier, negative, not quite so grumpy, (not) so negative, sometimes begrudgingly, pretty open, sometimes, loving, without begrudging, without grumbling, (without) complaining, ongoing, intensity, sometimes, preferably not, usually fairly good, better, hopefully, enough, frazzled, earlier than normal, pretty much, pretty decent, pretty good, older, older, busy, old enough, on	

	<p>close, too busy, (not) spontaneous, casual, not a go-getter, pretty well, lead, weird, pretty well, well, pretty good, pretty free, pretty vulnerable, amazing, fairly well, (not) very vocal, very well, plenty, smoothly, closest, good, (not) super successfully, (not) bad, rule-driven, relationship-driven, (not) real strong, negative (23 positive/19 negative)</p>	<p>time, proper, little more easy, more laid back, more vulnerable, (not) super closeness, superficial, good, good, unified, important, good, good, better, flat, negative, whole lot better, deepen, probably, hard, certain, certain, easier, not necessarily, certain, definitely, spiritual, specifically, short (49 positive, 19 negative)</p>
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